Śakti Cult in Orissa

Francesco Brighenti

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

In the Hindu worldview, Śakti is the Mother of the Universe: the highest primal power. She is, accordingly, the all-pervading, intagible energy principle that propels the cosmos and its endless human dimensions with the life-throbs of activity and culture. Many are her songs, countless her stories, numerous her names. Worship of Śakti, as a pan-Indian phenomenon, predates Sanskritic influences of every kind. Combining his extensive fieldwork with diverse published and unpublished sources: archaeological, historical and religious, Francesco Brighenti's study traces its presence in Orissa. Which, perhaps, provides the best paradigm of an age-old Goddess cult, deeply rooted in the autochthonous religious traditions of Eastern India.

It is the first, all-encompassing study, in an ethono-historical perspective, exploring the multilinear evolution of Śakti worship in Orissa: from the pre-/proto-historical times to the late medieval epoch, and even its continuity into the modern period — with contextual focus on its probable genesis, historical development, festivals, ritualistic patterns, and cultural sources including myths, legends and folklore. The book also incorporates, besides a description of important Śakta centres in Orissa, a study of the Divine Mother's iconographic features in Her multifarious manifestations.

Together with around hundred illustrations highlighting the varied representations of Śakti in sculpture, this study will interest not only the scholars of archaeology, history and religion, but historians of art as well.

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Dedicated to

Dr. Harish Chandra Das

my Guru

Preface

THE subject, 'Śakti Cult in Orissa' has been studied after thorough survey of the Śākta sites of archaeological, historical and religious importance in the State in a span of three years. My research work, based on a historical approach, covers chronologically the period going from the pre- and proto-historic epoch to the close of the medieval epoch touching upon the continuity of the cult till the modern period.

My study shows that Śāktism, both in the all-India and Orissa's contexts, not only developed as an independent religious fact, but also crept into the mainspring of Indian religions. I have attempted to systematically depict the rise and spread of Śakti cult with its multifarious, both national and local manifestations in the sacred land of Orissa, incorporating the non-Āryan and Āryan trends which evolved and developed in the country over the ages.

The work is based on my field study as well as the reference to the published and unpublished works in the line that were available to me. Interpretations and conclusions made in the appropriate places are of mine, based on my observations relating to the theoretical concepts and the viewpoints of the scholars.

I may make it clear here that I have not used the diacritical marks on the place or locality names (towns, villages, rivers, mountains, sites, etc.) but used them appropriately in the names of the deities, temples, literary works, rites and festivals and Sanskrit or typical Oriyā words. As regards the footnotes referring to articles from journals or miscellaneous works, I have used the abbreviation '*art. cit.*' (article cited) instead of '*op. cit.*' (work cited) as generally used in the case of referring to books. The abbreviation '*ca.*' (*circa*) has been here used instead of '*c.*' as customarily used by many scholars. Finally, I have discussed the Śakti cult of Orissa with reference to the old thirteen districts (which have in the meantime been divided into thirty).

I feel it expedient to extend my heart-felt thanks to scholars, friends and the institutions for their help and assistance in undertaking this work. I am extremely grateful to Dr. H.C. Das, my Ph.D. Guide, for extending his unstinted help and guidance from the beginning till the completion of the work. I am thankful to Dr. K.S. Behera, Senior Professor of History, Utkal University for inspiring me to take up this subject for Ph.D. My thanks are due to Prof. J.K. Das, Vice-Chancellor, Utkal University for allowing me to register as a Ph.D. candidate in his University. My special thanks are accorded to Dr. G.G. Filippi, Professor of

History and Indology, Ca'Foscari University, Venice for his suggestions and ungrudging help, particularly in regard to providing Italian source books for my research work. I am extremely grateful to the Superintendent of the Orissa State Museum, the Librarian, Śrī M.K. Samal, and the photographer of the Museum, Śrī S.K. Patnaik, for providing bibliographic indications, library facilities and allowing me to photograph the sculptures preserved in the Museum. Particularly Śrī Patnaik, who is well acquainted with most of the archaeological sites of Orissa, has helped me a lot in providing me the background materials. My thanks are due to several friends of Old Town, Bhubaneswar who have given me encouragement in the work as well as accompanied me to visit several sites. Lastly I accord my thanks to my wife Roberta, my brother, father, mother and family members, and finally to my father-in-law for their constant encouragement and support, save which the work could not have been completed.

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Introduction

In course of my visits to the Indian sub-continent and studying the books on Indian culture, I was attracted to Śāktism and other important facets of Hinduism or Brāhmaṇical religion. India is a land of multifaceted religions; in all such forms, whether it is folk, tribal or classic one, Śakti is present and over the ages it became an integral part of the different religious systems which together earned the distinction of what we term Indian religion.

I have travelled many States of India, from south to north, and visited the archaeological and historical sites and also the museums of archaeology. Gradually I was attracted to the subject Śāktism and the anthropomorphic emanations of the Goddess found in different parts of the country, depicting the art styles of various schools and the peculiar iconographic features. It was, no doubt, an awe-inspiring experience, but illusive to comprehend the subject and the deep rootedness of Śakti cult in India.

In my second visit to the present State of Orissa, which is known as the land of excellence of art and famous for the cult of Jagannātha, the *rāṣṭra-devatā* of the country and the quintessence of the mainspring of Indian religions, and which is also the land of tribals (forming about one-fourth of its total population), I was surprised to see the myriads of sculptures in nooks and corners of the State and the magnificent temples, monasteries and caves. I am tempted to note here that the statement of Fergusson that Orissa preserves about half of the total Hindu monuments of India is true here as one goes round the places.

It was under these circumstances I deemed it wise to concentrate my study upon the cult of Śakti in this sacred land of art, which astonishingly preserves the archaeological treasures from about the third century BC to the late medieval period. But I was at a loss to decide what to do, how to study this unknown and complicated subject in a land alien to me. Fortunately Dr. K.S. Behera, Senior Professor of Ancient History and Archaeology, whom I met in 1994 to find out a solution to my inquisitiveness, suggested me to contact Dr. H.C. Das, Superintendent of Museums, Orissa, who has done some work on Śakti cult and the tribals based on thorough fieldwork. Then actually came the chance for me to study the subject. The guidance of Dr. Das, with the suggestion to take up this subject in a comprehensive manner, keeping in view to the chronology and typology of Śaktis historically, rendered an invaluable service to me. Accordingly, the prepared scheme for my Ph. D. 'Śakti Cult in Orissa' under the guidance of Dr. H.C. Das was submitted to the Utkal University, Bhubaneswar for approval.

It was then my responsibility to go through the books and journals relating to the subject in the Indian and Orissan contexts and to take up the field study site by site from one district to the other. Gradually I equipped myself with theoretical knowledge on Śāktism and the interrelated religions, supplemented by the field experience. In this connection, J.N. Banerjea's *Development of Hindu Iconography*, N.N. Bhattacharyya's *History of the Śākta Religion*, P. Kumar's *Śakti Cult in Ancient India*, D. Kinsley's *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, R.C. Hazṛa's *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, D.C. Sircar's *The Śakti Cult and Tārā* and *The Śākta Pīṭhas*, the English translations of some *Mahāpurāṇas*, etc., were of immense help in my work.

The theoretical aspects along with the mythological stories and legends have been used indirectly as the bases of my work, but my main concentration has been to trace out the origin, evolution, historical development, iconography, ritualistic pattern, etc., of the Śakti cult in the context of Orissa as a separate entity. In fact, overlapping in this respect is but natural inasmuch as the political demarcation of Orissa, which formed in the past parts of the Oḍra, Utkala, Kaliṅga, Kośala regions, varied from time to time. It is expedient to mention that Oḍra, in the eighth-ninth centuries AD, was a small kingdom in the coastal region, Utkala a vast kingdom under the Bhauma-karas and the Somavaṁśīs, Kośala a kingdom in the hinterland under the Pāṇḍuvaṁśīs, Śarabhapuriyās, Nalas and Cauhāns, and Kaliṅga, a vast empire under the Imperial Gaṅgas and the Sūryavaṁśīs. All of these Orissan royal dynasties have, in course of ages, nurtured the religious faiths, developed and erected the monuments, carved the intricate sculptures based on iconography, introduced the complicate ritualistic patterns, elaborated and associated the all-India and local myths in their own styles to turn their faiths more acceptable to the people at large. In my work, however, I have frequently used the term 'Kaliṅga', which finds mention on works at least from the time of the *Mahābhārata*, to indicate legibly the coastal belts of present Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and parts of West Bengal.

For the above reasons, it is profitable to highlight the Śākta tradition, which is more or less the same in the geographical region conventionally termed as Kaliṅga, without referring to the trends prevalent in other regions of India.

I sincerely felt as the work progressed, though slowly, that Orissa is an enchanting land of art, religion and culture, which are preserved in pristine forms despite the impact of modern forces. But it is surprising to me that, so far, most of the scholars of Orissa as well as of India have written volumes unfortunately without visiting many interesting sites connected with Śakti cult. The field-notes of Western scholars such as Kittoe, Stirling, Fergusson, Hunter, Beglar, Risley and a few others were mainly the bases of earlier works done by Indian and Orissan scholars on the religious aspects of Orissa. Thanks to Prof. K.C. Panigrahi, Prof. N.K. Sahu, P. Acharya, K.N. Mohapatra, Dr. S.N. Rajaguru, Dr. R.P. Mohapatra, Prof. K.S. Behera, Prof. M.N. Das, Dr. M.P. Dash, Dr. P.K. Ray, Dr. H.C. Das, Prof. S.C. Panda, and a few others some substantial works were produced in the line. The works of these scholars, though not complete to my view, are significant for my study, providing a lot of information to understand the sites and icons along with their history. Particularly the stupendous work of T.E. Donaldson entitled *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa,* in three volumes, which has been done for the first time through thorough survey and exploration of many archaeological sites of Orissa, is a compendium for further study of Śakti cult. The recently published book of Dr. H.C. Das *Iconography of Śākta Divinities*, in two volumes, could not unfortunately be utilised for my purpose as I got it after I had completed my this research.

Despite these most valuable works, I feel, much remains to be touched upon sincerely and systematically. I believe, the present work of mine is the result of my three years sincere and laborious attempt.

II

It is in this context I take up the subject of my study. The scholars in the disciplines of religion and culture, particularly in the Indian context, will agree with me that Śakti, the primordial energy of the universe, has been an immanent force both in the animate and inanimate aspects of life. Such an inconceivable, unknowable, omnipotent, omni-present force is taken as the basis of all religious faiths. Śakti or cosmic energy is the binding force particularly in respect of the Indian religious arcane, which is multilinear in its scope unlike the unilinear Muslim or Christian thought. In a multilinear religious system, this conceived concept interacts intermittently keeping the former alive and continue, uninterruptedly growing in dimensions.

Various schools of thought of Indian religions have put forth their views in regard to the origin and spread of Śakti in the religious phenomena in their own ways, but no consensus has emerged yet. It is significant to note here that, of all the schools of thought in this regard, the viewpoint of the Śiva-Śakti school is more appropriate to understand the significance of the Śakti. The Āgamas, Nigamas, Śākta Purāṇas and Upapurāṇas, while elucidating the all-powerful Śakti, have gone far to relate that minus her, in any form, the male manifestations of the godhead are powerless.

Another school of thought is of the opinion that the concept of Śakti was directly originated from the primitive mother-goddess cult, which was a prominent feature in the prehistoric religions, and that it gradually crept into the tribal and folk communities and subsequently into the mainstream of Indian religions, incorporating through a slow process local godlings, diverse heterogeneous elements, customs, rites, worship patterns, myths and legends of multifarious nature. Thus, in the view of this school, no other living religion can claim to have such an ancient, continuous and colourful history with richest sources of mythology and theology along with numerous manifestations depicting malevolent and benevolent aspects of the Śakti.

The peculiarity of Śāktism, in contrast to other Indian religions, lies in its prolificity and universality by throwing its doors open invariably to the people of all castes, creed and sects. As a result, the Śākta religion could have devotees or followers from all strata of the society and had wider acceptability to other religions (and vice versa). Tantrism in particular, a well-known trend in religious efflorescence, finds its flowering in amalgamation with Śāktism. At a particular time of history, indeed, both the trends of thought were so inextricably integrated that one could not possibly be separated from the other.

In the early medieval period the Purāṇas (composed and compiled mostly during the Gupta period) and Upapurāṇas highlighted the female principle to such an extent that Śāktism could flourish as an independent religion. The Mahāśakti, Mahādevī Durgā, born out of the concerted energies of the great gods as conceived in the *Devī-Māhātmya* section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* and also in other Purāṇas, became the all-powerful and all-pervasive great Goddess capable to annihilate the dangerous and powerful demons. This is just one example bespeaking the glory of the Mahāśakti that pervaded the whole religious arcane of the Hindu world. All the other gods, who created her, became subservient to her, acting upon at her direction. In order to help the Mahādevī in her combat against the turbulent enemies and to protect the universe and *dharma*, many more female manifestations were created by the gods and also by the Mahādevī herself at particular situations in accordance with necessity. Historically speaking, around the fifth-sixth centuries AD the pantheon of Śākta goddesses in Hinduism with iconographic and literary sources was remarkably far excelling the manifestations of other allied religions. This indicates a wider acceptance of goddess-worship in the Hindu world. As a consequence of proliferation of the faith, some of the older goddesses of the Vedas, who were subordinate to the male gods, emerged with new vigour. The pantheon was further multiplied with the addition of Sanskritised and anthropomorphised tribal and folk goddesses of ancient origin.

The concept of *bhakti* inculcated in Vaiṣṇavism, which became a part of the Śakti-*sādhana*, further heightened its importance. Thus, Śāktism became the most popular religion, having the highest following. Therefore, the study of Śāktism is not just merely a study of one aspect of Indian religious thought, but, in essence, it is the depiction of Indian tradition itself. With this at the background, I have touched upon the Śakti cult of Orissa microcosmically.

III

It may be reasonable to point out that my approach to Śakti cult, which is an admixture of heterogeneous elements of the non-Āryan and Āryan origin through permutation and combination coming to a stage — what we term as standardised Śakti cult of a particular region, more appropriately in the historical period —, is a little digression from the traditional historical approach; in essence, it is an ethno-historical approach.

The historians of Orissa who have studied this interesting but complicated Śakti cult have concentrated themselves to its development only during the historical period, leaving aside the aspects in the pre- and proto-historic epoch and in the pre-literate and primitive tribal communities that also nurtured the faith in different forms. Keeping in view to my scope of study, I have initiated my discussion from the pre- and proto-historic and folk-tribal levels. Thus, the first chapter, entitled 'Autochthonous Roots of Orissan Śāktism', deals in short with the migrations and emigrations of the Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian and lastly Āryan ethnic groups, tracing their origin to the pre- and proto-historic epoch, the worship of the female principle in the matriarchal societies, the propitiation of female deities among the primitive tribal communities, the origin and development of goddesses in aniconic forms, tracing the similar developments in other civilizations of the world, the interrelations of Śakti with Nāga and Yakṣa cults, that found their emergence in the early historical period, the multifarious contributions of tribal shamanism to the development of the Śākta efflorescence and, finally, the worship of pillar- and pole-goddesses of the pre-literate societies and the incorporation of these deities into the fold of Śāktism. My concentration in this section is basically limited to Orissa in the wider context of the neighbouring regions of eastern India, which has been the cradle-ground of Śāktism.

The history of Orissa virtually starts from the fourth century BC with the invasion of a Nanda king of Magadha for the purpose of taking away the *Kaliṅga-jināsana* (the national religious symbol of the then kingdom). This was perhaps the first known event of the contact of Kaliṅga with some other region of the country. The second invasion, led by the Magadhan emperor Aśoka in 261 BC, was the greater landmark, not only in the history of Orissa but of India too, and also in the religious history, as this was a turning point in the spread of Buddhism in particular, in the country as well as abroad. It is extremely important that Aśoka led the foundation of Buddhistic sculptural art, particularly at Bhubaneswar, wherein we come across the depiction of female figures in the railing stones (recovered in large number from Bhubaneswar and its environment) and the voluptuous figures of *nāga-nāgī* and *yakṣa-yakṣī* (the earliest Śākta icons of the historical period in Orissa), belonging to the post-Mauryan epoch.

The next stage of development of this sculptural representation is noticed in the caves of Udaygiri and Khandagiri (Bhubaneswar), dug out during the reign of Mahāmeghavāhana Khāravela in around the first century BC. These caves, which were exclusively meant for Jaina recluses, give in rilievo style the development of sculptural art, which in the subsequent period was the main medium of depicting the gods and goddesses. Thus, this peculiar ancient cave art and architecture of Orissa is basically the precursor of the temple art and architecture that emerged successively from the following centuries.

Unfortunately after Khāravela till the rise of the Guptas the history of Orissa as well as of its religions is somewhat hazy, as no systematic attempt has been made by the scholars to enlighten us. To our good fortune, a stone inscription of Mahārāja Gaṇa discovered from a tank near the present shrine of Bhadrakālī at Bhadrak, inscribing the name of the goddess Parṇadevatī (the Female-Deity-of-Leaves) and datable to the third century AD, speaks of the continuity of Śakti cult in Orissa in its so-called 'dark period'. Some copper-plate grants of the Māṭharas, Vāśiṣṭhas, etc., who were ruling in small principalities, give a faint idea of the cult of Viṣṇu that developed in those regions in about the fourth century AD (Gupta period).

It is an established fact that the Guptas, in the fourth century AD, built a far-flung empire bringing about a renaissance in all aspects of culture. We are not sure whether the Guptas invaded Orissa, but the impact of their cultural insurgence was certainly felt in this region during their times as well as in the subsequent periods. The Gupta style of art and architecture was very much developed during this period. The two-armed Mahiṣamardinī image representing the goddess Virajā at Jajpur and the flat-roofed brick temple (the remains of which are to be seen at Kalaspur, the original shrine of Virajā at a distance of two km to the south of Jajpur), assigned to the early Gupta period, respectively depict the evolution of Śakti cult and form the nucleus of early Hindu architecture in the first centuries of the Christian era. In the first section of the second chapter I have attempted to pay special attention to the origin of the cult of goddess Virajā, being the earliest known Śākta deity of Orissa.

In the next sections my attention is respectively focused on the cult in the post-Gupta period and in the Bhauma-kara epoch, which was responsible in incorporating the Tāntric elements into the fold of Śaivism, Śāktism and Buddhism and carving out the iconic images of numerous gods and goddesses; the Śaiva-Śākta sects, particularly those of the Kāpālikas and Kaulas, were associated in the same epoch with the Śākta temples in performing Tāntric rituals.

The next section in the chronological order discusses the development of Śāktism under the Somavaṁśī rulers who succeeded the Bhauma-karas with their capital at Jajpur, the famous seat of Virajā. They were responsible in bringing about a revolutionary change in the sphere of religion by eliminating most of the *vāmācāra* Tāntric elements but also by developing Śakti cult in a more prolific way by carving the masterpieces of images of Mahiṣamardinī, Saptamātṛkās, Pārvatī and numerous other sculptures with exquisite workmanship. These monarchs also built-up the most magnificent Hindu temples of Orissa, citing for example, the Mukteśvara, Rājarāṇī, Brahmeśvara, and finally the sky-kissing

Liṅgarāja temple at Bhubaneswar, and surprisingly introduced the images of *nāyikās*, the erotic couples in various seductive poses, and the dancing and singing by the damsels (known as *devadāsīs*) as a part of the temple rituals (first introduced in the temple of Brahmeśvara at Bhubaneswar). In essence, the illustrious Somavaṁśī kings developed and spread Śāktism to an unprecedented degree on the foundation of which, during the rule of the successive dynasties of Orissa, the flowering of Śāktism as well as of other religions reached the zenith.

The Imperial Gaṅga and Sūryavaṁśī epochs (*ca.* AD 1110-1540) are marked for territorial expansion to all sides of the Kaliṅgan empire, economic prosperity, development of art and architecture (particularly during the Gaṅga period), rise of the *bhakti* movement with the advent of the great religious savants like Rāmānuja, Śrī Caitanya, etc., to Puri (the seat of the far-famed cult of Jagannātha), the emergence of syncretistic cult with Śrī Jagannātha at the apex, the spread of Jagannātha culture far beyond the borders of the Kaliṅgan empire, military expansionism, unification of the feudal hierarchy, etc. In the true sense, the long period of reign of these two dynasties for a span of about five hundred years, which may rightly be termed as the golden period in the history of Orissa, witnessed remarkable development in all aspects of culture.

Architecture in this period reached the highest watermark of development, as can be envisioned, for example, in the stupendous monuments of Jagannātha temple at Puri and the world-famous Sun temple at Konarka. The accumulated experience of the artists for centuries was reflected in the life- or over-life-size sculptures of the cult images and in other divine and human figures along with numerous narrations and motifs in the temple walls. In fact, the sculptural depiction in the temples was remarkably superb and enchanting.

This period also witnessed the amalgamation of Śaivism and Śāktism with Vaiṣṇavism (the main trend of the age), bringing to light a sort of syncretistic religion accepting Jagannātha as the pivot. The trends of thought prevalent in Śāktism found place in the Vaiṣṇavite ritualistic pattern. The preaching of eminent religious saints, the composition of Vaiṣṇavite literature in regional language, and especially the spread of *kīrtana* (singing of devotional songs in accompaniment of *mṛdaṅga* and cymbal by the Vaiṣṇava devotees), introduced by Śrī Caitanya, further accelerated the Vaiṣṇava movement, thus, making it a mass religion.

Similarly, in the sculptural representation Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, Śivaliṅga and Jagannātha were depicted together to mark the syncreticism. With the construction of the great Sun temple, the *Pañcadevatā-upāsanā* (adoration of the five deities of the traditional Hindu pentad, namely, Śiva-Śakti-Viṣṇu-Sūrya-Gaṇeśa) became a fundamental aspect of Orissan religious culture. Śrī Jagannātha, the cult hero, conceived by the later Gaṅgas and the Sūryavaṁśī Gajapatis as the head of the State or *rāṣṭradevatā*, became the supreme religious authority sanctioning the political actions of the monarchs of Orissa. This strong religious policy in the name of Śrī Jagannātha was essential to control and unite the heterogeneous feudatories of the empire.

The manifestations of Śakti in this period mostly find their expression in association with Vaiṣṇavite male deities in the composite forms of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Lakṣmī-Varāha, Lakṣmī-Nṛsiṁha, leaving aside, of course, the Śiva-Śakti union, although independent Śākta shrines were also established and temples erected.

In the last section of the second chapter I have dealt with several other ruling families of Orissa who had their patron goddesses under different names, but all propitiated as the protectress goddess Mahādevī Durgā. Most of the Śākta goddesses installed or highlighted in the medieval period are still continuing as the presiding deities of the living shrines of Orissa.

In the third chapter, entitled 'Important Śākta Centres of Orissa', I have attempted to discuss those which have earned eminence with large following and those which are still in working order as the Śākta *pīṭhas*. I have in the discussion not touched upon the traditional concept of the so-called Śākta *pīṭhas*, which are usually associated with portions of the Devī's body fallen from the shoulders of Mahādeva while roaming madly with the dead body of Satī, and with forms of Bhairava. From this point of view, the *kṣetras* of Virajā, Ekāmra and Puruṣottama with Vimalā find mention in the lists of Śākta *pīṭhas* enumerated differently by different Purāṇas (from eight to one hundred-eight *pīṭhas*), but in Orissa some other great Śākta centres, although they have not been linked with a form of Bhairava (supposed to be in the *pīṭha* as the consort of Śakti), are none the less the great centres of Śāktism as well as of other associated religions. I have avoided to speak of the minor Śākta centres, numerous in Orissa, as these have been directly or indirectly discussed in appropriated places. The eight so selected far-famed religious centres discussed in the Book are described in Orissa as the eight traditional Caṇḍī *pīṭhas* with important goddesses enshrined in the strategic locations of the State.

Chapter four deals with the main manifestations of Śakti in Orissa such as Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, Siṁhavāhinī Durgā, Cāmuṇḍā, the Divine Mothers, Vārāhī, sixty-four Yoginīs, serpent goddesses, Pārvatī and Lakṣmī, delineating their development with different iconographic features — having of course the regional variations based on mythology and local traditions — and their spread over different areas of the State. For each such manifestation I have endeavoured to offer my viewpoint in the regional and all-India contexts as these deities are prevalent in all parts of the country, showing the differences in the artistic representation and mode of worship. As regards the river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā, who are depicted in the role of doorkeepers in almost all the medieval Śaiva and Śākta temples of Orissa as auspicious symbols, I have omitted to deal with them as they have not enjoyed here the cult status. I may also benignly mention that I have avoided, as far as possible, the complicated iconographies of the goddesses recorded in the Purāṇas and Tantras, emphasising only those which are essential in the context of the iconographic representation of the goddesses of Orissa.

The last chapter of the work discusses the interesting Śākta festivals and the intricate rituals, some of which are still in vogue in Orissa, signifying the continuity of Śāktism here as a mass religion. The Śākta festivals of Orissa are numerous, but I have selected for discussion the important ones in cyclic order starting from the month of the New Year, Caitra (March-April), and ending with the human and animal sacrifices connected with Śakti cult as a part of rituals. Once again, I may humbly relate that, in course of the discussion, I have often given my personal interpretations of some typical rites and festivals theologically and sociologically in the wider context.

Lastly I believe that my sincere attempt to deal with the complicate subject, which was totally alien to me in the beginning, will be of some help to the scholars and students in history, archaeology, history of art and of religion as well. I crave the indulgence of the scholars for errors of omissions and commissions, which must have come in the course of my discussion.

1

Autochthonous Roots of Śakti Cult in Orissa

Śakti cult, either in its culturally elevated expressions and in the popular ones, appears, to a great extent, to sink its own roots in some non-Vedic regional religious traditions of India. Such a historical postulate, generally applied to the study of the origins of Śakti cult in the all-India context, seems particularly valid in the case of Orissa, a land in the eastern seaboard of India.

Female-oriented religions — which best expressed, in Orissa as everywhere in the Ancient World, the primitive spiritual beliefs of the Neolithic cultivators inasmuch as they were generally centred round the worship of some form of Mother Earth, conceived as the 'chthonic womb' out of which the seeds were grown thanks to the nourishing substances furnished by the dead creatures[1] — could grow undisturbed for a long time in Orissa before being absorbed into the fold of Brāhmaṇical religion in the historical period. It seems, in fact, that the Sanskritisation process of tribal religions was brought to an end in Orissa's alluvial lowlands only in about the fourth century AD, when the allied Śaiva and Śākta creed ultimately asserted their authority over the region.[2]

Orissa's long isolation from northern India also explains why some of the goddesses who were originally worshipped by the indigenous peoples of that region have gained in course of time a fairly prominent position in local Hinduism and have been unintermittingly worshipped there as Śākta deities, without any distinction of caste, from the Gupta age till today. This fact is also noticed in Bengal and Assam, which were similarly long isolated by jungles and swampy river valleys from the rest of north India.

Prior to giving the proper historical picture of Śakti cult in Orissa as it resulted from the above-sketched process, it is necessary to expound some theories regarding the pre-history and proto-history of eastern India in order to trace Orissa's place within the Neolithic culture complex that developed in that area before the beginning of the Āryan ethnic and cultural penetration. Such Neolithic complex appears, on the whole, to have formed the basic characteristics of the Śākta religion in the regions extending from Assam to Madhya Pradesh and from Bihar to Bengal.

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[1] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, New Delhi, 1974, p. 2.

[2] D.P. Pattanayak, 'Aryanisation of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. VII, No. 1, pp. 51-5.

The Austro-Asiatic cultural heritage of Orissa

The very likely existence of pre-historic cultural interrelations between South-East Asia and eastern India has long represented, and still today represents, a matter of great controversy among scholars. In both those ethno-geographic areas, indeed, we record the presence of similar megalithic traditions, of techniques of workmanship of stone implements and, above all, of linguistic elements that seemingly testify to the development, in a very remote past, of common cultural features in the vast countries surrounding the Bay of Bengal. Yet a theory, founded on solid archaeological bases, being able to explain these objective cultural similarities is at present still lacking.

What appears certain is that the Proto-Australoid racial type, as classified by B.S. Guha,[3] represents one of the main components, and most likely the most ancient one, either of the admixture of peoples inhabiting the greater part of the Indian sub-continent and of that inhabiting South-East Asia; nevertheless, the original area of expansion of the so-called Proto-Australoids, as well as the time and the ways of their spreading over the Indian sub-continent, Indo-China and Indonesia, are not clear to science yet. The same is valid in regard to Guha's Paleo-Mediterranean racial type, to which the ethnic groups who diffused the Dravidian languages over India could have originally belonged. In the course of a series of successive migratory waves the Paleo-Mediterraneans, probably coming from the Near East, greatly intermingled their own genetic patrimony with that of the Proto-Australoids, which had spread throughout the Indian sub-continent at a much earlier date; therefore, nowadays it is practically impossible to draw on a scientific basis a demarcation line between the dark-skinned and broad-nosed Indian descendants of those two human stocks. As a matter of fact, in course of millennia the Proto-Australoids and the Paleo-Mediterraneans mixed on the Indian soil to so great an extent, that the original differences between the two ethnic types, though still present on the linguistic plane, are now scarcely identifiable on the genetic one.

The linguists generally agree in identifying the Paleo-Mediterraneans with the carriers of the Dravidian languages into India, while they are in possession of too scanty scientific data to ascertain which were the languages originally spoken by the peoples belonging to the Proto-Australoid ethnic stock, who probably began to settle in the Indian sub-continent during the Paleolithic age. The Austro-Asiatic speeches, that were largely diffused among the latter peoples prior to the advent of the Paleo-Mediterraneans and their forms of speech, were, in fact, introduced into India only in the Neolithic age along with a more advanced agriculture-based form of civilization. An Indo-Chinese branch of the Proto-Australoids was most likely responsible for these linguistic and cultural migrations.[4]

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[3] Reference is here made to the racial classification proposed in B.S. Guha, 'Racial Affinities of the Peoples of India', *Census of India,1931,* Simla, 1935.

The areas of the Indian sub-continent where the racial and cultural encounter between the Proto-Australoids and the Paleo-Mediterraneans took place were, in all probability, the whole Deccan up to the Vindhyas and the greater part of the Gangetic lowlands. The successive Āryan migrations did not alter very much the basic racial substratum common to both those regions, where an admixture of Proto-Australoid and Paleo-Mediterranean racial features, with the predominance of the former, is still largely prevalent among either the Āryanised low-caste people and the surviving aboriginal tribes.[5]

The structure of the population in the present-day State of Orissa, where one person out of four is taken into census by the Government of India as the member of a Scheduled Tribe, and whose native inhabitants are, as elsewhere in Middle India, an admixture of Hindu and tribal communities speaking different languages and dialects belonging to the Indo-Āryan, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian families, perfectly fits to the above expounded ethnical picture. Also in Orissa, as in the rest of the Deccan and in the Gangetic lowlands, racial characters of the Proto-Australoid type predominate among both low-caste Hindus and the tribals.[6]

According to most of archaeologists, Indian Neolithic cultures are marked for the manufacturing of the so-called shouldered stone axes, whose original seat of production was seemingly located somewhere in southern China, whence they spread toward Indo-China and the Malaya peninsula. In the opinion of a section of scholars, the manufacture techniques employed to produce these axes could have been introduced into eastern India through the valleys of upper Burma during the first millennium BC by groups of Neolithic farmers coming from Yunnan, a region presently situated in China. Yet, the hypothesis has also been put forward, that some early maritime contacts with Burma and Malaya across the Bay of Bengal might have likewise favoured the diffusion of the lithic industries in question over eastern India. In the latter case, the coastal strip of Orissa could have played an important role in the technical acculturation process at issue.[7] In fact, the art of oversea navigation was, most likely, already known in Orissa in pre-historic times, as it may be evinced from a study of the archaic pirogues, built without the use of metal techniques, that are still in use among the fishermen settled along the coast of the State.[8]

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[4] R. Biasutti, *et al.*, *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, 4th edn., Torino, 1967, II, p. 589.

[5] A. Daniélou, *Storia dell'India*, Roma, 1984, pp. 14-47.

[6] R. Biasutti, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 595-6.

[7] D.N. Majumdar, *Races and Cultures of India*, New York, 1961, p. 21; M. Wheeler, *Civiltà dell'Indo e del Gange*, Milano, 1960, pp. 83-9; A.H. Dani, *Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India*, Calcutta, 1960, p. 100.

[8] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

The eminent scholar R. Heine-Geldern identified the Neolithic culture stream of the shouldered axe with the supposed great pre-historic migration of the Austro-Asiatic (Munda and Mon-Khmer) peoples to India from the east. His hypothesis is yet untenable, since most of modern archaeologists are prone to believe that the Neolithic culture complex of eastern India developed before the hypothesised farmers (or seamen) coming from Indo-China started to introduce their lithic industries into the region during the first millennium BC.[9] Therefore, so far as the study of the Neolithic religions of eastern India, including the cultus of Mother Earth, is concerned, it is not so important to ascertain whether the Indian tribes presently speaking Munda and Mon-Khmer languages migrated *en masse* from Indo-China to India, or were rather originated by degrees owing to the influence exerted by Austro-Asiatic cultures over a pre-existing Proto-Australoids racial substratum.

The Austro-Asiatic (otherwise known as Kolarian) stream coming forward from the east, either in the form of a series of human migrations or in that of a progressive cultural conquest, is believed to have met, somewhere in Middle India, the Dravidian stream coming forward from the West and to have been partly absorbed by the latter and partly dispersed in the hill jungles and the river valleys of the Vindhyas and of the Eastern Ghats. These pre-historic migrations finally led to the settlement of the Dravidians over the whole of the Deccan Plateau, including Orissa, on whose territory the Dravidian-speaking Kondhs, Gonds and Oraons are now found settled amidst the more numerous Munda-speaking tribes.[10]

The different branches of the Munda ethnic family are generally mentioned in the ancient Sanskrit texts of northern India under the all-inclusive name of Śavaras. The latter denomination, presently spelt as Saora, nowadays designates only a section of Munda-speaking tribes settled in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.[11]

The ancient Śavaras — of whom the present Hill Saoras of Ganjam and Koraput districts of Orissa might be the descendants — were feared and hated by the Āryans, who considered them as barbarous and half-demoniacal savages. They were described as warlike border tribes who militarily resisted the advance of the Āryan invaders. They made their individuality very strongly felt in ancient India and earned for themselves, in the *Mahābhārata*, the title of 'terrible Śavaras'.[12]

The tribes settled in south-western Orissa and in Bastar find mention in some Aśokan rock edicts, from which it is evinced that those hilly and forest-clad tracts, unlike the coastal plains of Kaliṅga, were never brought under the direct Mauryan imperial administration and continued to enjoy their internal sovereignty under tribal chiefs.[13]

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[9] A.H. Dani, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-4.

[10] L.P. Vidyarthi and B.K. Rai, *The Tribal Culture of India*, New Delhi, 1976, pp. 26-7.

[11] V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, London, 1955, pp. LI-LII.

[12] W.W. Hunter, 'Orissa under Indian Rule', in N.K. Sahu, ed., *A History of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1956, p. 52.

Among the present Hill Saoras of Orissa, as well as some other eastern Indian tribes speaking Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian or Tibeto-Burman languages or dialects, megalithic cultures are a still living tradition, although they are now undergoing a fatal and rapid process of decline. The origin of such cultures, based on the erection of big stones for funerary, memorial or ritualistic purposes, still represents a mystery. The earliest megaliths discovered in north-eastern India, Chota Nagpur and Orissa, in fact, do not appear to be culturally associable with the far better known megalithic tombs of the Deccan, which in shape and function differ very much from the former and were, most likely, erected by Dravidian peoples at a very late date, comprised in the first millennium BC. On the contrary, the megalithic monuments of eastern India were associated by M. Wheeler and others to the interrelated Neolithic complexes of Indonesia, the Philippines, Formosa and Oceania, the eastern areas of diffusion of the Austric linguistic super-family, of which the Austro-Asiatic languages spoken in India represent the western branch.[14]

Yet, dating the earliest megaliths found in eastern India still represents a problem. None of them, indeed, has been so far associated on an archaeological basis to cultures of the Neolithic type.[15] It seems, on the whole, legitimate to relate the ancient megalithic monuments of eastern India, as well as the forms of religion attached to them, to the Austric culture stream coming from Indo-China, which invested the region in a remote stage of the Neolithic period (possibly starting from the fourth-third millennium BC).

The objection, put forward by some scholars,[16] that the sole monsoon climate, common to both southern and south-eastern Asia, may have determined the parallel and independent development of similar cultural features in those two areas, does not seem to take sufficiently into account the analogies, very striking indeed, between the megalithic rituals still observed in the course of this century among some tribal peoples of Orissa, the Khasis and Nagas of Assam, and the Gonds of Bastar on the one side, and among the most archaic tribes of Indonesia and Oceania on the other. This kind of megalithic activity, meant for the propitiation of the dead ancestors and centring round chthonic-funerary rituals consisting in the erection of menhirs, dolmens, circles of stones, wooden poles, etc., is often associated with the sacrifice

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13. K.C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa* (*Hindu Period*), Cuttack, 1981, pp. 14-5; R. P. Mohapatra, 'Forts and Palaces of Orissa', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, Cuttack, 1993, pp. 121-2.
14. M. Wheeler, *op. cit.*, pp. 157, 160, 170-1 and 176-7, J. R. McIntosh, 'Dating the South Indian Megaliths', in *South Asian Archaeology: Papers from the Seventh International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe*, Napoli, 1985, II, pp. 467-93.
15. A.H. Dani, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
16. D.G.E. Hall, *Storia dell'Asia sudorientale*, Milano, 1972, pp. 37-8.

of buffaloes or other bovines, which is, among other things, also one of the distinctive features of the Śākta ritual in India.[17]

The anthropologists believe that the main purpose of these funerary monuments was to 'fix' the souls of the dead to the soil so as to influence positively the fertility of the fields, as well as to give the shades of the dead a temporary abode on the earth in order to prevent their 'dangerous' wandering among the living. The megalithic funerary monuments of eastern India were thus a way of protecting life against death.[18]

The earliest stages of Śakti cult in India, during which different manifestations of an earth-goddess, originally worshipped by the non-Āryan tribes, were represented in the form of shapeless stones or of wooden poles, appear to be deeply rooted in the above discussed megalithic traditions, mainly associated with Austro-Asiatic cultures, but also present in some archaic Dravidian cultures (see, as an instance, the Kondh representation of the earth-goddess, Tari Penu, as a *darni*, i.e., a cairn of three stones covered by a fourth, whose shape recalls a dolmen's one). It is, however, still not clear how far the tribal megalithic traditions meant to honour the dead ancestors may be related to the cultus of Mother Earth. In India, indeed, there is generally no direct connection between megalithic monuments and the stones or poles worshipped as symbols of the Goddess.[19]

Many primitive communities of India have always worshipped their village goddesses — the female personifications of both life-giving and death-giving power — under the name of *mātṛkās*, a word of Austric origin (Polynesian *matariki*) that was later on adopted by the Āryans to designate their Divine Mothers. These tribal female deities, who still nowadays manifest themselves in a protruding rock, a dark cave, a heap of stones painted in red, a monolith or a pole planted in the soil, an isolated tree surrounded by a platform or fence, are the 'ancestresses' of Hindu village goddesses, who are often represented by similar cult objects. It is possible that even the worship of the male generative principle was originally part of the religious traditions of the Austro-Asiatic-speaking peoples. The latter, indeed, used a common term (variously spelt as *lakuṭa*, *laguḍa* or *liṅga*), later on adopted in the Indo-Āryan vocabulary, to denote their digging sticks as well as their probable cult object, the stone phallus (cf. the Sanskrit term *lāṅgala*, meaning a plough).[20] Large upright monoliths regarded as phallic symbols and connected with fertility rites are also found in Indonesia, thus, evincing a further nexus between the most archaic Austro-Asiatic and Austronesian cultures.[21]

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[17] M. Wheeler, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-8.

[18] M. Eliade, *Trattato di storia delle religioni*, Torino, 1954, pp. 224-6.

[19] W. Koppers, 'Monuments to the Dead of the Bhils and Other Primitive Tribes in Central India', *Annali Lateranensi*, vol. VI (1942), pp. 200-4.

[20] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[21] R. Biasutti, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 779.

Tribal beliefs of the animistic type, having originated from pre-historic cults devoted to the dead ancestors and to the spirits or divinities dwelling in nature and, most likely, originally connected with the Neolithic cultures associated by the scholars to the Austric peoples, appear to have deeply influenced the development of popular Hinduism in eastern India. Animism, chthonic-funerary cults, ancestor-worship, the worship of a divinity of soil (the so-called 'Mother' of this or that variety of cereal) and the domestication of bovines (perhaps destined also to ritual sacrifice, as it is still nowadays customary, for instance, in Vietnam and Indonesia) are also known to have characterised the early phases of agricultural civilization in South-East Asia before the Indian cultural influence manifested itself there in the historical period.[22]

In Orissa, as it will be shown below, propitiatory rites meant to appease the feared forefathers and other malevolent spirits, figures of shamans interpreting the will of the deified entities who are believed to populate the world, and cruel bloody sacrifices, generally offered before female deities in order that the latter do not alter, or restore, the precarious natural equilibrium which the survival of agricultural communities depends on, have long since become an integral part of folk Hinduism, and in particular of its Śākta ramifications, thanks to the process of Sanskritisation of earlier tribal religions.

The above considerations (which are, of course, not exhaustive) are meant to show that the earliest stages of Śakti cult, especially in so far as the territories of eastern India are concerned, should be studied in connection with that vast culture complex that most of scholars associate to the earliest speakers of the Austro-Asiatic languages. In the Neolithic age Austro-Asiatic cultures and speeches were spread over the Indian sub-continent and South-East Asia, yet their original territory of diffusion was slowly fragmented in later epochs due to the expansion of more aggressive and better organised peoples, such as the Dravidians and the Āryans in India, and the Tibeto-Burman and Siamese-Chinese tribes in Indo-China. The formation of a chain of detached cultural islands, which are presently found in a state of regression and decadence, was the final result of this historical process. At any rate, some of the elements belonging to the Austro-Asiatic culture stream deeply influenced the later civilizations built by the newcomers. The cultus of Mother Earth is perhaps one of the most significant religious features inherited, at least in part, by the historical cultures of India and Indo-China from the Austro-Asiatic ones.

As is shown by the entire history of mankind, community of speech among bodies of men, rather than the latter's belonging to one and the same 'racial' group, often implies that they originally had similar material cultures, economies, social usages and values, customs and religions, all of which, as a rule, find expression in the development of similar languages.[23]

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[22] D.G.E. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[23] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Despite this, the anthropologists have so far laid much stress upon the analogies between the modes of production prevailing, respectively, among the Austro-Asiatic-speaking tribes settled in India and the ones settled in Indo-China — based, in both cases, on nomadic agriculture or primitive peasant agriculture — without undertaking an overall historico-comparative study of the religions of all those tribes. Such a study would probably allow the indologists to better understand which was the specific role played by the Austric cultures, and which was, on the contrary, the one played by the Dravidian ones in the formative phases of Śakti cult in India. For now this distinction, given the scarcity of exhaustive archaeological and anthropological data about the matter, can be almost exclusively traced on the basis of some inductive hypotheses. In the present work the Munda and the Dravidian contributions to the evolution and development of Śakti cult in Orissa are, therefore, generally termed as 'pre-Vedic' or 'non-Āryan' elements, without any further specification as to their ethno-cultural and historical peculiarities.

The Dravidian cultural heritage of Orissa

In the opinion of many anthropologists, the peoples who diffused the Dravidian languages over India during the Neolithic period were an eastern ramification of the Mediterranean race or better, to use the terminology of R.P. Heras, of the great Indo-Mediterranean area of civilization, which seems to have extended from Spain in the West to the whole of the Indian sub-continent in the East prior to the beginning of the Indo-European and Semitic migrations.[24]

The most up to date studies of comparative linguistics show that Dravidian languages were originally connected with the form of language spoken in ancient Elam, a region situated in south-western Iran. The neighbouring region of the Zagros mountains, that was part of the so-called 'Fertile Crescent' of the Near East since the beginning of the great Neolithic agricultural revolution, has been indicated by the archaeologist C. Renfrew as the possible place of origin of proto-Dravidian languages. The Dravidian 'demic' wave, along with the adoption of Neolithic agriculture, could have advanced from thence to south-east and finally reached India.[25] The advance of Dravidian languages across the Indian sub-continent from north-west to south-east appears to have been connected with the progressive diffusion of a new kind of food-producing economy (agriculture associated with the breeding of bovines), as well as with the art of metal-working (copper, bronze), pottery-making, and the beginning of the urbanisation process.

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[24] R.P. Heras, *Studies in Proto Indo-Mediterranean Culture*, Bombay, 1953, p. 63.

[25] C. Renfrew, 'Le origini delle lingue indoeuropee', *Le Scienze — quaderni*, Milano, No. 86 (Oct. 1995), p. 51.

The widespread Mediterranean stratum of population seems to have played a fundamental role in the birth of all of the great civilizations of the Ancient World from India to western Europe.[26] In this connection, A.K. Coomaraswamy states that an ancient art, whose traces are equally found in Europe, in the Near East and in India, impressed its own mark on all the great civilizations that developed in Eurasia in the historical period. This hypothesised great proto-historic art movement, in its general traits, probably constituted a form of spiritual expression common to all of the Indo-Mediterranean peoples.[27] More recently, the existence itself of a Mediterranean area of civilization — it would be incorrect to call it a 'race' — has been doubted by some scholars. C. Renfrew, for instance, has put forward the hypothesis of an early Neolithic civilization of Europe and the Near East led by the Indo-Europeans. Without entering this complex question, it can only be said here that the existence, in those areas of the Ancient World, of a vast substratum of pre-Indo-European forms of speech termed as 'Mediterranean' by the old school of linguists, which in certain cases present some striking linguistic affinities, seems to contradict Renfrew's theory.

It appears logical to infer that the so-called Mediterranean Neolithic cultivators may have influenced the later developed civilizations of the Ancient World in other manifestations of the human spirit than artistic creativity, including among these the religious sphere. As regards specifically the origins of Śakti cult in India, there is a vast scientific literature dealing with the possible common roots of the numerous female-oriented cults that were part of different religions of the Ancient World. Such cults are esteemed by many a scholar to have developed, more or less independently, in south-eastern Europe, western Asia and the Indian sub-continent in connection with the growth of agricultural societies. In such a view — which also assumes as a historical truth the existence of goddess-cults in fully developed form in the ancient Indus Valley civilization (a fact that is questioned by a section of scholars due to the lack of decisive archaeological evidence)[28] — the Indian forms of cult based on the worship of the female principle are inevitably traced back, for the most part, to the Dravidian ethnic or cultural stream.

Dravidian cultures, as above stated, appear to have originated in close contact with the Neolithic culture complex of the Near East, to which the discovery itself of agricultural techniques, possibly due to woman's inventiveness, is generally ascribed. Some scholars assert that the Neolithic West Asian cultures were similar to the early Dravidian ones in their being characterised by the worship of an earth goddess with a young subordinate god

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[26] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

[27] A.K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, London, Leipzig and New York, 1927, pp. 5 and 14.

[28] D. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, Delhi (etc.), 1986, pp. 212-20.

(the so-called proto-Śiva?) as her 'husband', by a matriarchal tradition based on the principle of mother-right, and by a complex of magic fertility rituals, perhaps performed for the most part by women, which possibly included blood offerings made before the cult images of female deities. The latter ritual practice was probably conceived as a way to potentiate the fecundity and vigour of plants, animals and men by the imitation of the flux of menstrual blood, regarded since the Neolithic age as the chief manifestation of the life-giving power inherent in the female body. Also erotic rites, aimed at increasing the generative powers of the earth-goddess on the basis of the establishment of a mystic-sympathetic correlation between the vital functions of human beings and the rhythms of nature, might have been part of the hypothesised common form of religion of the Indo-Mediterranean Neolithic peoples. This is also one of the most probable cultural sources of the later Tāntric sexual rites, which typified the Śākta religious sects in India in the historical period. Erotic rites associated with goddess-cults are generally esteemed to be older than the Tantra literature, so that the so-called primitive Tantrism is now regarded by some scholars as an universal complex of religious ideas and practices rather than a specifically Indian phenomenon.[29] At any rate, it must be mentioned here that the contributions of the early Dravidian civilization to the evolution of Hinduism form the object of an old controversy among scholars.

The possible pre-Vedic contributions to historical Hinduism, particularly in so far as the origin and development of Śakti cult are concerned, are enumerated by N.N. Bhattacharyya — a follower of the theories pivoted upon the idea of a pre-historic goddess-cult having extended from the eastern Mediterranean basin to India — as follows:[30]

(a) Worship of the female generative principle that was believed to be inherent in the soil as well as in all women, she-beasts and plants, and to which was attributed a much more important role than the male one (a conception that seems to have been introduced into India by the supposedly matriarchal Dravidian cultivators).

(b) Worship of *liṅga* and *yoni* (representations of the male and female sexual organs which originated, perhaps in an independent way, within both the Dravidian and the Austro-Asiatic cultural streams to be subsequently adopted by Brāhmaṇical Hinduism as the symbols of Śiva and the Devī respectively).

(c) Pilgrimage to holy places (which, in the case of Śāktism, gave origin to the tradition of the Śākta *pīṭhas*).

(d) The rituals of *pūjā* performed inside the temple before the image of a god or goddess as opposed to the ritual of Vedic sacrifice.

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[29] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-11.

[30] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 20. The additions within brackets represent the opinions of the present writer.

(e) Magic fertility rites associated, in some cases, with erotic rites (subsequently conserved and crystallised in the Tantras).

(f) Religio-philosophical ideas pivoted upon the dualism, typical of the Sāṁkhya-*darśana* as well as of the allied Śaiva and Śākta creeds, between the male principle of *puruṣa* and the female principle of *prakṛti* (the latter having a more significant role than the former in the eternal process of creation, as it must have appeared logical in a female-dominated society, such as the ancient Dravidian one supposedly was).

(g) The practice of *yoga* (possibly starting from the *kuṇḍalinī* one, the ancient *yoga* of the Serpent, which may have been originally connected with some pre-Vedic serpent cult, and which in historical times became one of the two principal methods of spiritual reintegration proposed by Tantrism, the other one being ritual love-making).

The above outline, despite its intrinsic coherence, is based on a 'tendentious' reading of some of the archaeological data provided by the excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro and on the 'negative' evidence represented by the absence of the cultural elements in question from early Vedic texts. Some other scholars are, thus, inclined to take such speculative theories as exaggerations, firstly because they trace back to non-Āryan cultures all the post-Vedic religious phenomena not mentioned in Vedic literature,[31] and secondly because they take it for granted, even in the absence of any decisive evidence, that there must be a continuity between the ancient Indus Valley religion and Brāhmaṇical Hinduism.[32]

Coming now to Orissa, a land situated on the eastern margin of what is called Middle India, it is extremely difficult to determine, in our present state of knowledge, the importance of the influence of the Dravidian civilization in this part of the country in the course of the proto-historic epoch. In fact, apart from the ethnological evidence represented by the presence of some Dravidian-speaking tribes (the Kondhs, Gonds and Oraons) on the territory of the State — the date of beginning of which cannot, at any rate, be established with certainty, there is complete lack of archaeological evidence about this matter.

According to a section of scholars the proto-historic kingdom of Kaliṅga (what is now South Orissa), mentioned in several passages of the *Mahābhārata* along with the adjoining kingdoms of Utkala and Oḍra, remained one of the most important centres of the Dravidian civilization till its annihilation at the hand of the Maurya emperor Aśoka in consequence of the famous Kaliṅga War (*ca.* 261 BC), during which, as is stated in Aśoka's Rock Edit XIII, 100,000 inhabitants of the country were killed and 150,000 were made captive.[33] The excavations conducted at the proto-historic fort of Sisupalagarh in close proximity to

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[31] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. L'Induismo recente*, Milano, 1981, pp. 29-33.

[32] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-8.

[33] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

Bhubaneswar, whose construction started as early as the end of the fourth century BC — namely, before Aśoka's invasion of Orissa —, have shown a noteworthy homogeneity with other coeval sites of South India (the historical area of population of the Dravidians), which is possibly indicative of the fact, that the socio-economic system adopted by the inhabitants of that fort was more 'southern' than 'northern'. Yet, curiously enough, the earliest levels of Sisupalagarh show more affinities with the excavated sites of North India.[34] At any rate, neither the possible early influence from North India on the Sisupalagarh culture, nor the still not proved influence of the Vedic Āryans on the pre-Aśokan kingdom of Kaliṅga, authorise one to exclude the hypothesis that the proto-historic cultures of Orissa, for a long time before Aśoka's invasion, were dominated by a mix of Dravidian-*cum*-Austro-Asiatic elements. In this respect, K.C. Panigrahi does not consider unlikely that languages and dialects of the Dravidian and Munda origin were widely spoken in Orissa before the invaders from Magadha imposed their languages of the Sanskritic origin — Pāli and Prākṛts — on the Kaliṅgan people.[35]

As a consequence of Aśoka's conquest of Orissan lowlands and of the gradual penetration of Āryan elements into the region, some tribal groups of Kaliṅga (Munda and Dravidian alike) were probably forced, in order to maintain their independence, to migrate into the hill tracts situated along the Eastern Ghats.[36] Among those, there were probably the ancestors of the Kondhs, a Dravidian-speaking people whose proto-Śākta traditions have no doubt influenced the historical development of Śakti cult in southern and western Orissa. The practice of sacrificing human beings as a means to propitiate a great Goddess, that the Kondhs share with other important Dravidian-speaking tribes of Middle India (Gonds, Oraons), but not at all with the Munda tribes, constitutes in Orissa one of the relevant points of contact between the most extreme currents of Śāktism and the earth-goddess cult as was historically practised by some influent Dravidian-speaking tribes settled in the north-east quadrant of the Deccan. Human sacrifice, however, might also have not represented an original feature of the religion of the Kondhs, Gonds and Oraons, but rather, have been adopted as a central ritual practice owing to the influence exerted by Hindu Śāktism on the cultic system of those tribes during the medieval period.[37] Be that as it may, a point of equilibrium in this debate seems to be that of admitting a continuous interchange of principles, rites and magic practices between Śāktism and the cults professed by the Dravidian peoples of Orissa starting from the period of ascent of Sanskritised Śāktism in that part of India. The same hypothesis appears to hold good also as regards the relations that may be found between Orissan Śāktism and the different sorcery, witchcraft, shamanistic and megalithic traditions of the Munda tribes. As a matter of fact, in Orissa as everywhere in India the 'primitive' tribes of the hills never lived totally separate from the 'civilised' populations of the plains, for which reason it can be inferred that a complex mechanism of interrelations between the multifaceted religious systems pertaining to those two human groups existed since very ancient times.

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[34] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-17 and 264-5.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 281-2.

[36] B.M. Boal, *The Konds*, Bhubaneswar, 1984, pp. 209-15.

[37] R. Rahmann, 'Shamanistic and Related Phenomena in Northern and Middle India', *Anthropos*, vol. LIV (1959), pp. 745-6.

It, thus, appears more than probable that the contributions of the hypothesised mixed form of civilization of proto-historic Kaliṅga, resulting from the encounter of Dravidian and Munda cultural elements, were very determinant as to the rise and development of Śākta cults (mainly Brāhmaṇical, but also Buddhist and Jaina) in Orissan alluvial plains in the course of the process of Sanskritisation that invested the region starting from Aśoka's invasion. Such contributions regard those aspects of Śakti cult which, in Orissa as elsewhere in India, find no mention in the Vedas. The most important among them are discussed in the next sections.

Worship of the female principle in pre-patriarchal societies

The debate revolving round the problem of the existence or not, in pre-historic India, of human communities founded economically and culturally on mother-right has been going on for decades and is still not concluded. Without entering this complex question, it will be pertinent here to suggest, that female-oriented cults may have been introduced into ancient Kaliṅga in an elaborate form by the Dravidians, who possibly also integrated into such cults some of the pre-existing religious beliefs and practices of the Munda peoples. This new phase of Indian religious history, as earlier stated, had probably much more to do with the agriculture-based economy and the matrifocal society, which probably prevailed among the Neolithic populations of the entire Indo-Mediterranean cultural basin, than with the pre-agrarian economy and cultural forms that still today characterise the Munda peoples. The anthropologist D.N. Majumdar states that

> The Mediterranean must have been matriarchal and none of the proto-Australoid tribes, except those who have been influenced by the dominant matriarchal people of Malabar, are matriarchal or were so in the protohistoric times.[38]

Matriarchal cultures have left the most evident traces of their ancient diffusion in India in the matrimonial customs of some communities settled in the south-western regions of the Deccan. Polyandry, a matrilineal descent system, the easy dissolution of marriage links, the scarce faithfulness of married women, and some female initiatory rites, observed by the anthropologists in that part of South India either among some Dravidian-speaking primitive tribes and among some elevated Hindu castes such as the Nairs of Malabar, might represent the last vestiges of the hypothesised Dravidian matriarchal cultures of the proto-historic period. The fact that some remainders of mother-right and polyandry are found, along with some elements of sex-worship, also among the Oraons, a Dravidian tribe settled in eastern India, is of great interest in this connection.[39] It is admitted by some scholars that the Oraons, as indicated by their ancestral traditions, may have migrated from Karnataka to the Chota Nagpur Plateau, where they are presently settled, in the last centuries of the pre-Christian era or in the first ones of the Christian era.[40] They might, therefore, have represented a branch of the Dravidian culture complex of the south, which, in proto-historic times, might have extended as far as eastern India, Orissa included.

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[38] D.N. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

As regards the position of woman in the ancient Kaliṅgan society, the early sculptures in the Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves near Bhubaneswar, carved in a period roughly comprised between the second century BC and the first century AD,[41] may be of some help to the scholar. The position of woman, as depicted in those old Jaina rock-cut caves, appears to have been very important in the then aristocratic society. Ladies accompany their royal or noble husbands, perform dance sequences (possibly the earliest surviving sculptural representation of Oḍissī dance), take part in orchestra with playing musical instruments, are engaged in mortal combat, ride over elephants and horses, kill ferocious lions, climb tall trees; but they are also shown as devoted wives nursing the wounded or sick soldiers, or while attending religious rites in a pious mood.[42] It appears rather evident that aristocratic men and women enjoyed the same status and took part in all walks of life in that period of Orissan history. Moreover, the depiction of girls dancing before the emperor Khāravela or round the sacred tree, found in one of the caves at issue,[43] show that the women of those times had already initiated the tradition of sacred dance, which in subsequent times will progressively evolve into that of the temple dancing maidens (*devadāsīs*). In a word, women occupied a relevant place also in the religious ceremonial of ancient Kaliṅga, as it seems to have been the norm in the ancient Dravidian societies of South India.

Despite this, one must not think that the high status enjoyed by women in the proto-historic Kaliṅgan society, which appears to be linked with the highlighting of the female principle, is ascribable to the Dravidian civilization only. As a matter of fact, the Munda tribes, whose cultural traditions are generally esteemed to antedate by far the earliest penetration of the Dravidian element into Orissa, must have played an equally important role in the emergence of the centrality of the female principle in the region.

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[39] R. Biasutti, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 612 and 615-7.

[40] L.P. Vidyarthi and B.K. Rai, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-2.

[41] D. Mitra, *Udayagiri and Khandagiri*, New Delhi, 1975, p. 13.

[42] R.P. Mohapatra, 'Position of Woman as Depicted in the Early Sculptures at Udayagiri and Khandagiri', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vols. XXIV, XXV and XXVI, pp. 61-4.

[43] D. Hota, 'Traditional Odissi Music — A Performing Art', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 279; P. Mohanty-Hejmadi, 'Odissi Dance in a Historical Perspective', *ibid.*, p. 298.

The marriage customs observed by most of Orissan tribes in the present days still indicate the sexual freedom and high status traditionally enjoyed by women in the tribal society, both of which probably date from the pre-historic period. Unlike the Hindu custom, there is no dowry system among the aboriginal communities of the State, whereas it is the bridegroom who must pay a price for the bride at the time of marriage. Among some tribes, the female child enjoys a greater respect and prestige than the male one. Pre-marital chastity is not considered as the sexual norm; rather, the tribal society often permits the free mixing of unmarried boys and girls in the well-known youth dormitories, representing a place for nocturnal adventures (love, sex) and merrymaking (dance, songs) not only for the male, but for the female too.[44]

Also among the Nāgas of Assam, whose culture has much in common either with the cultures of the Austro-Asiatic tribes and with those of some Austronesian tribes of Indonesia and Oceania, there are special buildings where unmarried girls freely receive their lovers. The remainders of matrilineal descent system are reported to survive in Assam among the Austro-Asiatic Khasis and the Tibeto-Burman Garos and Bodos. In this regard, Assam appears to have formed a culture bridge between pre-historic India and South-East Asia. In fact, the remainders of primitive societies based on mother-right are, rather significantly, also found among some Austronesian tribes settled in Sumatra and the surrounding islands, the Nicobars, Borneo, Celebes, the Malaya peninsula, Formosa and southern Vietnam.[45]

Worship of malevolent female deities and spirits

The central tendency of tribal religions, in Orissa as elsewhere in Middle India, is the propitiation of malevolent spirits or divinities to whom sacrifices, involving in most cases an outpouring of blood, are offered as a means to appease them and soothe their wrathful character. In primitive religions sacrifices are generally linked to earth cultus, both in relation to the agricultural cycle and to the spirits of the dead, who are imagined to reside in the bowels of the earth and are, thus, identified with the earth itself. Various kinds of domestic animals are sacrificed to ancestral spirits or terrific deities dwelling in nature, to whom alcoholic drinks are often offered too.[46]

In this connection, it must be remembered that the Devī, as described in the two *Durgā-*

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[44] K.M. Mohapatra, 'Tribes of Orissa', *ibid.*, pp. 383-4.

[45] R. Biasutti, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 696-7, 715, 746, 757-8 and 774.

[46] *Ibid.*, I, p. 705.

stotras of the *Mahābhārata* (IV.6 and VI.22) and in the *Harivaṁśa*, (II.3.6-8 and II.22.52-56) is associated to the non-Āryan tribes residing in the Vindhya mountains, who are there said to worship her through offerings of meat and wine. The ferocious and destructive virgin goddess, referred to in those texts, was probably a composite figure, formed by the coalescence of several non-Āryan malignant female deities.[47]

The malevolent attitude often ascribed to tribal and Hindu goddesses in India, is generally traced back in their respective myths to their having been, in a previous cycle of existence, women who were killed, or suffered some violence or outrage, at the hand of men. This fact, besides showing the original connection of primitive female-oriented cults with the propitiation of the spirits of the dead (in this case, female), might even be interpreted as the persistence of a mythological substratum in which the memory of an atavic violence, committed by the male towards the female through the establishment of a patriarchal and warlike society in the greater part of India, is preserved. The tribal communities of Middle India, despite their having originally had nothing to do with this kind of social order (which was, on the contrary, peculiar to the Āryan invaders, as is stated by many scholars), must have felt this great epochal change very much; therefore, they may have recorded it in their stories and legends.

Thus, one finds in the myths of the Munda-speaking tribes of Orissa a great deal of references to women who, after having died a violent death or having unfairly suffered for starvation, were believed to have turned into the supernatural dispensers of various diseases, to be appeased by the offering of blood. The Gadabas, for instance, believe that smallpox was brought among them by Būḍhī Mā (the Old-Mother), a deity depicted as a filthy old woman, once the latter had been driven out of a village by its inhabitants, to whom she had just asked some food for her and her daughters. In another Gadaba myth, it is stated that the goddess of cholera was originally a mother, who was devoured by her hungry children (numbering thousands) after the latter had escaped from the pot in which she had shut them up. The children were subsequently sent by her ghost to propagate cholera among men. A Jhoria legend runs that the sister of the two founders of that tribe, left alone and without food by her brothers, turned into a filthy crone avoided by all tribesmen and took her revenge with giving some diseases to the latter. Another Jhoria story ascribes the origin of diseases to the menstrual blood of a girl, who had been violated by two boys of that tribe. Rugaboi, the goddess of smallpox of the Hill Saoras, is said to have started to give men that particular disease after some criminals had robbed her of the pulses she was going to sell at the market. Finally, it can be mentioned here that the owl, considered a messenger of certain death by the tribals of Orissa and associated with the gruesome crone-goddess Cāmuṇḍā in some early Hindu sculptures to be found in the State, is said in some Bondo, Gadaba and Hill

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[47] A.K. Bhattacharya, 'A Nonaryan Aspect of the Devī', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *The Śakti Cult and Tārā*, Calcutta, 1967, pp. 56-60.

Saora legends to hold the soul of a murdered girl or witch.[48]

The theme of the injustice done to woman by man, perhaps referring to the passage from pre-patriarchal social structures to patriarchal ones, has an important function also in the class of myths concerning the origins of Hindu village goddesses (*grāma-devatās*). These deities, universally esteemed to belong to a non-Vedic religious substratum, were, in times past, increasingly propitiated with blood offerings during the outbreaks of epidemics, like the equivalent tribal female deities.

> These myths, with their theme of village goddesses' having suffered injustices at the hands of men, help us to understand certain central characteristics of village goddesses: namely, the fiercely ambivalent nature of these goddesses, which manifests itself in sudden outbursts of rage, and the goddesses' relative independence from or superiority over male consorts. Such goddesses' terrible retributive wrath continues to be expressed in festivals in which a male animal, often identified as a 'husband', is sacrificed. These goddesses are angry deities and need appeasing. Furthermore, they rarely provide a traditional model for women in their relationships with males. The village goddesses are often not married at all, and if they are, they dominate their male consorts — the reverse of what sexual roles should be according to Indian cultural models. It could be said of these fiercely independent goddesses that they have 'learned their lesson', that they have learned that they only receive injustice from males; consequently they are determined to remain independent from men in their transformed position as goddesses.[49]

More generally speaking, the propitiation of maleficent spirits dwelling in the natural world is a characteristic feature of folk Hinduism. The links of these demons and furies with the tribal and pre-Vedic strata of Hinduism are rather evident. The tribal peoples of Orissa still today venerate a vast body of lesser deities, ghosts and supernatural beings who appear to be the direct ancestors of the malevolent spirits propitiated by the Hindu folk. The worship of *grāma-devatās* in each Hindu village appears to have a similar origin. The same is partially valid in regard to the origin of Sixty-Four Yoginī cult, whose primary area of diffusion coincided with the tribal belts of Middle India. In fact, *yoginī* is still nowadays one of the favourite terms used by the Oriyās to indicate the deified ogresses and sorceresses who are generally considered responsible for unmotivated illness, delirium or madness attacks.

Among the tribal religions of Orissa, it is especially the Saora one, with its legions of deities, spirits and demons, its easy explanation of the origin of evil from malignant spirits whom one must appease with offerings to avert their attacks, and its magic lore in the

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48. V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, London, 1954, pp. 304, 322, 324, 486, 488-90 and 501-2.

49. D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-2.

matter of propitiation of deified ghosts, that appears to have exerted in the past ages the strongest influence on religious beliefs in rural Orissa. Moreover, it is interesting to note that many of the evil spirits propitiated by the Oriyā villagers are considered to be female. In fact, natural perils, inasmuch as they are powers operating in nature, are regarded as a special class of *śakti*s. This is also one of the constituting elements of the worship of the Mahādevī, who, as it is well-known, can alternatively show a benevolent or malevolent attitude towards mankind.

In the whole territory of Orissa the fierce and ambivalent village goddesses (*grāma-devatā*s) or plague-goddesses, the most eminent among whom are named as Ṭhākurāṇīs (Our-Ladies), are often worshipped jointly by the Hindu folk and semi-Hinduised tribal communities, who offer them animal sacrifices on some particular ritual occasions. They are generally represented by shapeless stones smeared with vermilion or attached with eyes, a nose, a tongue, etc., so as to suggest the idea of a feminine head. Such features, along with the restriction of priestly functions to śūdra castes only, indicate that the cult of *grāma-devatā*s, in Orissa as everywhere in India, has originated in the pre-Vedic society to be adopted, in course of time, by the mass of low-caste people, most of whom were of the non-Āryan origin. This folk cult, with its easy explanation of the origin of diseases from a malevolent 'foreign' *grāma-devatā*, who can be driven out the village by the help of the local benevolent *grāma-devatā* (admitted that the latter be correctly worshipped), appealed in all epochs to Indian village people's simple minds, and may be considered as one of the archetypal sources of Śakti cult in Orissa as well as in the whole of India.[50]

Every village of Orissa, even every individual household, has nowadays its own tutelary goddess worshipped under a variety of local names. These independent female deities, often associated in groups of two, three or as many as sixteen or more, are closely associated with the territory, the village or the house, of which they are regarded as the protectresses. The incredible proliferation of such tutelary goddesses is the best evidence of the popularity of Śakti cult in Orissa from the early times to the present age.

Aniconic representation of goddesses

Iconism and aniconism, with reference to the representation of deities, existed side by side In India from a very remote period. The aniconic mode of representation, which still survives in the present days, is undoubtedly the reminiscence of a more ancient practice.[51] The oldest and most popular aniconic mode of representation of a goddess in India is certainly the sacred stone block, whether protruding from a solid rock or being detached from the latter to be installed within a shrine. The stone or rock acting in many cases as the presiding deity of a Śākta sanctuary is generally regarded by the Hindus as a *svayambhū-mūrti* (self-generated image) of the Goddess, the same way as the so-called *svayambhū-liṅga*s are believed to be the self-generated manifestations of Śiva's phallus.

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[50] L.S.S. O'Malley, *Puri District Gazetteer*, New Delhi, reprint 1984, pp. 77-8.

[51] J.N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd edn., Calcutta, 1956, p. 82.

Some among the most celebrated and revered goddesses of Orissa have been worshipped in aniconic form since the establishment of their respective cults. These goddesses can be represented by an uncarved stone block, a rock outcropping from the top of a hillock or from a river-bed, a pillar-shaped monolith, or a head-shaped piece of stone endowed with artificial anthropomorphic features so as to suggest the idea of a goddess' face. Such aniconic idols, on the whole, make the eminent Śākta goddesses at issue similar to the rough stone simulacrum — it does not matter whether small or large in size — by means of which both the Hindu folk and the tribals of Orissa use to represent their village goddesses.

A different kind of Śākta aniconic cult object is constituted by the sacred pot filled with water, representing, as unanimously attested by the scholars, the Goddess' womb holding the sap of life. This form of worship, known in Orissa as *kalaśa-pūjā*, probably started soon after the invention of pottery-making in the Neolithic period, which revolutionised the economic life of the aborigines of India.[52] The worship of the sacred pot filled with water is adopted in Orissa especially on the occasion of some great Śākta festivals, and will be accordingly discussed in the chapter dedicated to such festivals.

In consideration of village-goddess cult, aniconism sometimes appears to be the ineluctable (or rather pursued?) result of regular worship activity. The continued *pūjā* rituals, based on application of vermilion paste and aspersion with water, can, in fact, determine, in course of centuries, the almost total defacement of the ancient images of Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina deities, both female and male, that it was customary in times past to install as the presiding deities of Orissan *grāma-devatā*-shrines.

It appears, on the whole, that aniconic goddess-cults be the dearest to the low-caste Hindu people of Orissa. Such a religious feature may indicate the latter's strong attachment to the traditions initiated by their tribal forefathers. The śūdra and semi-tribal Śākta priestly castes, such as the Bhaṇḍārīs, Mālīs, Rāuls, Dhobās, etc.,[53] who are by tradition responsible for cult practices either in the *grāma-devatā*-shrines and in some major Devī-temples of the State, are the main keepers of the ancient Śākta popular traditions of Orissa. Moreover, it is worth noticing that, as a general law, the semi-tribal communities of Orissa generally use to join the holy functions celebrated in the Śākta shrines at which the Goddess is represented in aniconic form, while they do not seem at all to be as much interested in worshipping regular images of Hindu goddesses. The rites performed in those eminent Śākta shrines of Orissa, at which the Goddess is worshipped in aniconic form, do not appear to differ to a great extent from those performed in the shrines at which the great Goddess is represented according to regular iconographic canons. In other words, the shapeless Śākta idols made of crude uncarved stone are identified by the Hindus with those Śākta deities, such as Durgā, Cāmuṇḍā and others, who have by tradition an iconography of their own. Even the draped clothes with which the temple priests use to adorn all Śākta cult images are in either case identical, with this making it difficult for the observer to perceive, at first sight, any difference between the dressed regular image of a Hindu goddess and the dressed stone simulacrum typifying the autochthonous goddesses-cults of Orissa.

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[52] R.N. Dash, 'Fasts and Festivals of Orissa', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 191.

[53] L.S.S. O'Malley, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

ANICONIC GODDESSES OF ORISSA

To draw a list of all the shrines of Orissa at which a goddess is worshipped in aniconic form is an impracticable task, in that such shrines number legions. The most noticeable goddesses who presently belong to this class, or belonged to it in the past, are enumerated below in a succession.

Goddess Bhagavatī, whose shrine is located at Banpur near Chilika Lake, is known to have been worshipped until recent times in the form of an uncarved piece of stone, although she is now represented by a disproportionate and iconographically irregular Devī image. On a rocky island rising in the nearby lake of Chilika, goddess Kālijāī is also represented by an uncarved stone idol. This, until recent times, was also the case with Bhairavī of Purunakatak (Phulbani district). Goddess Bhaṭṭārikā of Baramba, a centre situated on the middle course of the river Mahanadi, is presently represented by an old image of the Buddhist goddess Tārā, but was worshipped for centuries in the form of a rock protruding from a hillock, on which her temple was built in a subsequent period. Goddess Laṅkeśvarī of Sonepur is similarly represented by a small flat rock cropping up from the bed of the Mahanadi near a deep gorge; vermilion paste is applied onto the rock's surface in the guise of an oval to symbolise the goddess' face. In the premises of another eminent Śākta shrine situated along the course of the Mahanadi, Carcikā temple at Banki, a holy rock cropping up from the top of the hillock on which the temple was erected is said to be the 'birthplace' of the goddess, who at present is nevertheless worshipped within the temple sanctum in the iconic form of Cāmuṇḍā. The presiding goddesses of Tārā-Tāriṇī temple in Ganjam district, Tāriṇī temple at Ghatgaon (Keonjhar district) and Būḍhī Ṭhākurāṇī temple at Berhampur are all represented by head-shaped stones placed on the floor of the temple sanctum. Vyāghra Devī (the Tiger Goddess) of Kuladha, a Hinduised Kondh deity, is represented by a rock projection decked with artificial nose and eyes, showing a sort of human mask. Goddess Samalei of Sambalpur, whose shrine once stood on an island in the bed of the Mahanadi, which is now part of the river bank, is similarly worshipped in the form of a large block of stone, on whose surface a narrow groove is regarded as the mouth, and a protuberance below it, as the tongue of the goddess. Finally, the cult of goddess Stambheśvarī or Khambheśvarī, whose images consist of plain stone pillars or wooden poles, is much widespread in Orissa.

Many of the above-listed goddesses acted in the past as the tutelary deities of some of the royal families of inland Orissa, with this indicating that the aniconic manifestations of the great Goddess were locally very much revered, not only by the tribals and the śūdras, but even by their Āryan or Āryanised rulers. According to the legendary tales relating to the origins of some of the above-mentioned shrines, it was the goddess herself who ordered the people to worship her in aniconic form. This appears to be a later justification of the obvious fact, that these goddesses have been incorporated into the Hindu pantheon from pre-existing tribal religions, which had spontaneously conceived them in aniconic form.

The fact that many among these female deities have been installed in shrines built on hillocks or rocky islands shows that they were originally connected with the pre-Vedic religious concept about the goddess of the Mountain. Significantly enough, the most blood-thirsty among these aniconic goddesses of Orissa, such as Tārā-Tāriṇī, Vyāghra Devī and Maṇināga Devī, who were beyond doubt propitiated with human sacrifices, were installed on the top of some high mountain, representing the 'border of the world', so as to suggest, even from a 'physical' viewpoint, their terrible solitude due to their unrestrained thirst for human blood, which was considered to be beyond the comprehension of human beings.

THE GODDESS OF THE MOUNTAIN

The shapeless pieces of stone or rocks, representing the most archaic Śākta cult objects, can be regarded as reduced images of the Sacred Mountain,[54] which is esteemed by some scholars to have been one of the most ancient epiphanies of Mother Earth in the whole Indo-Mediterranean area of civilization. Consequently, rough pieces of stone, acting in proto-historic times as the symbols of Mother Earth, are to be found in the Mediterranean area as well.

Instances of this equivalence of religious symbols are numerous. A black piece of stone, which was possibly a meteorite having fallen from the sky (namely, having 'self-generated' like the Devī's *svayambhū-mūrtis*), was taken as the representative image of Cybele, the Mother of the Mountain of the Phrygian nation, whose cult was later on adopted by the Romans. In 204 BC, the latter transported with great pomp that stone from Asia Minor to Rome, where it was installed for worship on the top of the Palatine Hill (once again, a mountain) to mean the annexation of the exotic cult of Mother Earth, embodied by Cybele, to the Roman State religion.[55] The tremendous following soon gained by the new cult among the Roman low-class people indicates that aniconic earth-goddess cult was not unknown to the ancient Romans. In fact, also the archaic Roman fertility goddess Ops Consiua was represented by large stones, which were installed in holes dug in the ground.[56] Also the ancient Arabs venerated stone blocks as the representative images of their deities, as it is still today testified by the Black Stone of Mecca, a meteorite that, according to M. Eliade, was originally venerated as an image of the earth-goddess.[57]

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[54] J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant, *Dizionario dei simboli*, Milano, 1986, II, p. 218.

[55] M.A. Levi and P. Meloni, *Storia romana dalle origini al 476 d.C.*, Milano, 1986, pp. 126-7.

Mountain peaks, symbolised in many an ancient culture by simple pieces of stone, seem to have been regarded all over the world as the places from which the energies of the earth ascend to the sky. There, indeed, the earth and the sky merge in each other. The union of the sky, the abode of the supreme male divinity, with the energies of the earth, spurting upward from mountains, somehow binds the godhead to the world of the living. The goddess of the Mountain is the medium of this process, so it is especially to her that men and women have entrusted, in all ages, their most intense prayers to the supreme divinity. It is well known that, in the Hindu sphere, Pārvatī, daughter of Himavat (the Himalayan Range), is regarded as an intermediary between mankind and the Supreme Lord, Śiva. Goddesses associated with mountains are reported to have been worshipped in most of the countries of the Ancient World. The Sumerian goddess Nin-har-sag was called the Lady of the Mountain. Both Rhea at Crete and Diktinna in Greece were manifestations of the goddess of the Mountain. The archaic Greek poet Hesiodus (seventh century BC) states that mountains were the favourite abode of goddesses.[58] Even the ancient Japanese venerated a goddess of the Mountain, who ruled over the world of the dead.

To sum up, it cannot be excluded that the great goddess, supposed to have been worshipped since Neolithic times throughout the whole Indo-Mediterranean area of civilization, was originally represented by stones or rocks, recalling the concept about the Sacred Mountain, from the Mediterranean basin in the west to the Indian sub-continent in the east. In the latter region, this kind of aniconic representation of the earth-goddess may have been introduced by Dravidian peoples coming from the Near East.

Some autochthonous goddesses of Orissa, in particular those adored by the archaic Dravidian-speaking tribes living in the State, are identified with the earth and assimilated to mountains. This appears to be the case with the earth-goddess of the Kondhs, Dharni Penu, who is generally represented by a cairn of three stones. In her anthropomorphised aspect, under which she is termed as Nirantali, regarded as the divine institutor of agriculture born from the underworld, this goddess is said to have created buffalo — the most sacred

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56. G. Dumézil, *Idées Romaines*, Paris, 1969, pp. 293-6.
57. M. Eliade, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-5.
58. A. Daniélou, *Śiva e Dioniso*, Roma, 1980, p. 77.

sacrificial animal to the Śāktas as well as to several Indian tribes — in order that man could immolate it to the hills (which are, evidently, her supreme manifestation).[59] Also the Oraons, communities of whom have historically settled over northern Orissa, know a mountain goddess (or female spirit), named Baranda, to whom they periodically immolate buffaloes.[60]

Also the Munda peoples must have played a relevant role in the establishment of aniconic goddess-cults over Middle India. The uncarved stones worshipped by the greater part of the Munda tribesmen as village deities testify to this. Yet, the Mundas generally identify their sacred mountains with male *bongas* (divinities-spirits), chief among whom is the well-known Buru Bonga or Marang Buru. The identification of the Sacred Mountain with a female deity seems, therefore, to characterise more the Dravidian religions than the Munda ones. It must be noticed, in this last connection, that the Hill Saoras, perhaps the most representative Munda tribe of Orissa, have no Mother Earth in their pantheon, whereas they associate with the earth a number of deities of no great eminence; yet, the most important among these chthonic deities, Labosum, sometimes regarded as a male and sometimes as a female, is believed to include all of the gods of the hills in his own person.[61] Thus, also this Saora cult is likely to be related to the concept about the goddess of the Mountain, which, in view of its universality, could have been developed by the Munda peoples of Middle India, including Orissa, even independently from any Dravidian cultural influence.

Coming to Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, it is important here to mention that the Sanskrit names of such later Vedic goddesses as Umā Haimavatī, Durgā and Pārvatī, according to most of scholars, all emphasise the special relation of these deities with mountains and rocks. This, it is true, is primarily related to the fact that the abodes of those goddesses are said to be the inaccessible mountain regions of the Himalayas or of the Vindhyas, where they might have been originally worshipped by the non-Āryan tribes;[62] yet, a further key for the interpretation of such divine names might be even represented by the latter's hinting at the holy rocky matter, which the representative idols of the Indian tribal goddesses worshipped in aniconic form were made of on the analogy of mountains.

On the other hand, it is stated in the *Harivaṁśa* that goddess Kālī manifested herself by coming out of the body of Yaśodā's new-born daughter (who, as a matter of fact, was an incarnation of Nidrā or Mahāmayā, Viṣṇu's celestial 'sister') soon after the evil Kaṁsa smashed her against a rock (*śilā*). This mythical account appears to symbolise the primal self-sacrifice, specular to that of the *puruṣa*, through which the power of the great goddess was manifested in this world. With probable reference to this mythical episode too, and not only to her being the Daughter of the Mountain, Pārvatī (of whom Kālī is another aspect) is also known as Śailajā, i.e., the Offspring-of-the-Rock.[63]

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[59] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 352-3 and 636.

[60] S.C. Roy, *Orāon Religion and Customs*, Calcutta, reprint 1972, pp. 52-6.

[61] V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, pp. 80 and 298.

[62] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

THE ŚĀKTA PĪṬHAS

The theme of the self-immolation of the great Goddess, resulting in new ways of manifestation and salvation, also occurs in the mythology about Satī, Śiva's first wife, whose well-known episodes, pointing to the alliance of the female principle with Śiva, need not be referred here. What is important here to say is that, at a certain time during the medieval period, an expanded Śākta version of the ancient myth of Dakṣa's sacrifice, originally included in the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, was created in order to affirm the unity of all the *pīṭhas* (seats) sacred to the Goddess, at which the object of worship was mainly aniconic (that is to say, of the probable non-Āryan origin). The expanded version of the myth of Dakṣa's sacrifice narrates how the portions of Satī's body, cut up by Viṣṇu with his *cakra* to cure Śiva's tremendous grief for his wife's self-killing (which prevented the god to attend his own divine responsibilities), fell and fixed to those spots, which were subsequently known as Śākta *pīṭhas*. Since most of the said centres of goddess-worship certainly originated long before the medieval mythology about Satī was conceived by the authors of the Purāṇas, the main function of this story appears to be that of justifying from the Brāhmaṇical point of view the presence on the Indian soil of a very elevated number of Śākta shrines, at which the Devī was worshipped in aniconic form after the tribal and Dravidian fashion.

The term *pīṭha*, laying stress on the land-rootedness of the innumerable Hindu goddesses worshipped in the form of stone blocks, was, thus, used starting from the medieval period to indicate the seats of those goddesses, who were locally venerated by the non-Āryans since time immemorial. Such most sacred stone blocks were taken by the Hindus to be the limbs of Satī, i.e., of the Devī, whose burial ground was the Indian soil itself, sacralised by the presence of Satī's remains. The Śākta *pīṭha-sthānas* (places of fixation of the sacred seats of the Goddess), guarded by as many Bhairavas (the terrific forms of Śiva), were ever since conceived by the Hindus as the seats of particular manifestations of the one and only great Goddess, conceived as immanent in the sacred land of India. She is, indeed, Mother India. In this sense, one can say that the pre-Vedic concept about the earth-goddess or Mother Earth was transferred into the Brāhmaṇical Hindu ideology about the Śākta *pīṭhas*.[64] In M. Eliade's opinion the symbolism of the dismemberment of a divine being recurs in various shamanistic religions. While discussing the myth of the dismemberment of Satī's body, associated with the ideology of the Śākta *pīṭhas*, that scholar puts forward the hypothesis of its having derived from an indigenous fertility myth, perhaps originated in a shamanistic context, which was later on incorporated into Tantrism.[65]

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[63] M. Biardeau, *L'Induismo. Antropologia di una civiltà*, Milano, 1985, pp. 164-5.

[64] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-7.

Even though, by an extension of the term, all Śakti temples can be designed as Śākta *pīṭhas*, in Orissa the rank of *pīṭha* sanctified by this or that limb of the goddess is recognised, according to the lists attached to different Purāṇas, only to a few Śākta sanctuaries, namely, the temples of Vimalā at Puri, of Bhuvaneśvarī (mentioned as Kīrttimatī in the list of *pīṭhas* given in the *Matsya Purāṇa*[66]) at Bhubaneswar, and of Virajā at Jajpur. Nothing is known about the original appearance of the respective presiding goddesses of the first two shrines, while the aniconic form of the object of worship was most likely present at the earliest of the shrines dedicated to goddess Virajā at Jajpur (whose ruined basement, assignable to the Gupta period, is still visible in the nearby village of Kalaspur), as it will be more articulately discussed in the next chapter. The eight important Śākta *pīṭhas* of Orissa, most of which are not connected with the mythology about Satī, are dealt with in the third chapter of this work.

Links between Śakti and Nāga cults

Primitive tribesman's continuous interaction with the animal world gradually led him to isolate the essential traits of the character of the single animal species and to associate such characters with transcendent vital forces. In the course of pre-history this cultural process gave origin all over the world to cults centred round animal-worship. The origin of ophiolatry (serpent-worship), which is believed to be one of the oldest and most widespread forms of religion the world has ever known, is intimately connected with the effects that all animals had upon the mind of primitive man. The observation of animals gave rise to feelings of wonder, mystery, awe, respect and even emulation in the minds of our primitive forefathers, and this phenomenon was even more true as far as the serpent, and particularly the cobra variety, is concerned. The gliding vibrant motion of this animal, the belief in its immortality (originated by the observation of its periodical skin-shedding), its innate ability of disappearing all of a sudden into and reappearing out of underground passages, its capability to move both on the earth and in the water, the hypnotic power attributed to its glance, regarded as ultramundane, the sudden deadly consequences of its burning bite due to the magic, obscure and mysterious power of its poison, aroused feelings of terror or marvel and, consequently, led primitive man to propitiate its spirit through religious rituals.

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[65] M. Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, London, 1958, p. 347.

[66] V.S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa — A Study*, Varanasi, 1963, p. 105. Ekāmra *kṣetra* (modern Bhubaneswar) is mentioned as a Śākta *pīṭha* also in some of the Tantras (see K. S. Behera, 'The Evolution of Śakti Cult at Jajpur, Bhubaneswar and Puri', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *The Śakti Cult and Tārā*, p. 79).

According to most of scholars, ophiolatry was one of the distinctive features of the religiousness of the most primitive strata of the Indian population, belonging to the Proto-Australoid racial stock, and was, in all likelihood, also part of the much more developed Indus Valley religion, as it may be evinced by a scene of serpent-worship depicted on a famous seal unearthed at Mohenjo-Daro. The cultural contacts of the Āryans with the earlier inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent determined the absorption of ophiolatry into the former's religious horizon, as is testified by many passages from the Vedas. As it was the case with the cult of *yakṣas* (geniuses of nature), which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, the cult of *nāgas* (serpent geniuses) too continued to be all through the ages one of the most popular forms of worship among the folk masses of India. The innumerable references to the prevalence of serpent-worship found in Brāhmaṇical, Buddhist and Jaina religious texts show that this non-Āryan folk cult was also adopted by a section of the Āryan ruling classes of ancient India.[67] The gradual process of Sanskritisation that invested Nāga cult in the historical period made ophidic symbolism become one of the most pervasive and noticeable features of the mainstream of Indian religions, that is, of Jainism, Buddhism, Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Śāktism altogether.

The present section, with no pretension to be exhaustive in this regard, deals with the most salient interrelations of pristine Śakti cult with pre-historic ophiolatry. Such a specific inquiry, which leaves deliberately aside the interrelations of serpent-worship with other Indian religions, is motivated by the fact that ophidic symbolism is found associated with several Śākta divinities of Orissa. This age-old association must be probably traced back to Mother Earth cultus, which constituted one of the most important aspects of the religiousness of the non-Āryan peoples settled in that part of India.

THE SERPENT SYMBOLISM

As the researches conducted by M. Eliade have demonstrated,[68] serpent was, since the Paleolithic age, a symbol of the vital forces causing births and rebirths as well as of the latent, mysterious and occult dynamic energies pervading the entire universe, man's life included. This symbolic association was primarily inspired to primitive man by the characteristic spiral shape and wave motion of this animal, as well as by its cyclic skin-shedding and by the polymorphism of its line-shaped body. In fact, all of such features recall the eternal rhythm of time, the measure of which is represented, in this world, by the cycle of lunar phases.

Inasmuch as its nature is, to some extent, 'lunar', the serpent, like the spiral, the conch, etc., is a symbol of bio-cosmic transformation connected with the rhythms of fertility and fecundity and with the cycles of tides, rains, sowings, menstruations, etc., always in connection with the water element, that was significantly regarded in India as the mythical abode of *nāgas*. Since the Neolithic period, with the discovery of agriculture, one symbolism bound up the moon, waters, rains, the fecundity of women and of she-beasts, the fertility of fields, the growth of plants, the destiny of man after death and initiation to mysteries. The serpent, as it seems, represented for primitive man the quintessence of this sacred symbolism.

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[67] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-6.

[68] See M. Eliade, *Trattato di storia delle religioni*, pp. 158-9 and 169-85, from which the following elements of discussion upon ophidic symbolism have been reported.

The *nāgas* of Indian mythology, the most perfect symbol of the earth-moon-waters sacred complex, guard in their subterranean aqueous abode the vital energies contained in the liquid element. They are attributed the faculty to decide when and where such energies must be released to perpetuate life on earth (a belief that was probably originated from the observation of the periodical coming out of snakes from their holes during the rainy season). These energies or *śakti*s, symbolised by the gem or jewel (*maṇi*) associated with the mythical figure of the Maṇināga (the Bejewelled Cobra), are assimilated by the Hindus, by a shift of symbolic meanings, to the divine forces allowing man to achieve spiritual reintegration (see, just to make an instance, the yogic concept about *kuṇḍalinī*, the Power of the Snake residing in each single man, which is the microcosmic manifestation of the universal Śakti or cosmic energy).

The serpent was regarded since pre-historic times as the personification of the primeval divine wisdom that allows a person to free himself from the cycle of life and death through the initiation to mysteries and the practice of magic rites. This animal was, indeed, originally considered to be in possession of the divine knowledge deriving from shamanistic initiation. The attribution of such a magical character to the serpent may be connected with its glance, somehow resembling the ultramundane glance of the dead, and also to its chthonic nature, causing its association with the sinuous ways that penetrate the bowels of Mother Earth and lead to the mysterious centre where the latter's sacred energies are guarded by the serpents themselves. In most of shamanistic cultures, initiation is connected with the underworld, where the initiate magically transfers his own soul to take subsequently rebirth as an immortal being. In Indian mythology, the underworld (*pātāla*) is, rather significantly, described as the world of *nāgas*. Therefore, the hidden treasures guarded by Maṇināga of the Indian tradition, just like the treasures guarded by the mythical dragons characterising the mythologies of other archaic Asian cultures, appear to symbolise, among other things, mysteriosophical knowledge. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XIII.4, 3, 9) recognises that supreme knowledge, i.e., the Veda itself, is a form of the Doctrine of Serpent.[69] An identical concept is to be found in the doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The universal cycle of life and death, as well as the power to get rid of it and gain immortality through the practice of magic rites, was presided over, in different Neolithic religions, by the figure of Mother Earth, who gradually evolved in India into that of Śakti (the dynamic aspect of the godhead). The power of cyclic transformation, personified by this great goddess sharing in both the sacred nature of the earth and that of the moon, is well represented by the serpent by virtue of its above-discussed two-fold, both lunar and chthonic nature. In fact, the serpent appears and disappears like the moon and, like the latter, regenerates itself by changing its own skin; at the same time, its subterranean habits firmly link it to the earth.

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[69] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

Moreover, by virtue of its power over waters, the serpent was considered as the Master of Women: in fact, this animal was believed to be the supernatural 'controller' of menstrual cycle and, consequently, of woman's fertility. In India, just to make an instance, snakes are traditionally regarded as the healers of female barrenness and are, accordingly, propitiated with special rites (see the cult of serpent-goddess Manasā in Bengal, or also the Dravidian practice of venerating *nāgakkal*s, i.e., the 'stones of snakes', in order to get the boon of a child). This also appears to be connected with an archaic religious tradition that, in all probability, accorded to woman an important role in religious practices.

In Vedic terms, the lunar, fertilising and regenerating nature of the serpent, being similar to that of the earth-goddess, corresponds to the principle of Soma — a word that was also used as a proper noun to designate the Vedic moon-god presiding over waters and vegetative life. According to the Brāhmaṇical tradition, *nāga*s are the guardians of *soma*, the corroborating drink of the gods which represented the mythic equivalent of the divine principle in question. In later Hinduism the Soma principle is embodied by Pārvatī,[70] who nevertheless, being associated with mountains, expresses the earth principle as well, thus, concentrating in her person the two-fold nature of the great goddess of the Neolithic age.

Another important connecting link between primitive ophiolatry and female-oriented Neolithic religions is represented by the fact, that serpent was considered, in many esoteric traditions of the Ancient World (which probably descended from some earlier shamanistic cultures), as an epiphany of the mystery contained in the female and a symbol of the oracular wisdom implicit in Mother Earth. The rituals associated with various manifestations of the latter powerful deity, as suggested by the evidence provided, in the Mediterranean world, by the ancient Minoan and Greek civilizations, might have been once performed everywhere by priestesses in the presence of living snakes.[71] The esoteric relation uniting the serpent, sacred knowledge and the female principle, known to all the mysteriosophic traditions of the Ancient World, was given a shape in iconographic terms through the depiction of snakes on the cult images of many goddesses anciently worshipped in the Indo-Mediterranean area of civilization. For instance, the Greek goddess Hera, the Semitic Ishtar and the great goddess of the Minoans are often represented iconographically in association with snakes.[72] The priests and priestesses of the Egyptian goddess Isis wore on their head a sacred band surmounted by a stylised cobra. In India, the serpent was associated since early times with the iconography of many Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist goddesses.

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[70] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

[71] R. Eisler, 'La Dea della natura e della spiritualità', in J. Campbell, *et al.*, *I nomi della Dea. Il femminile nella divinità*, Roma, 1992, p. 17.

THE NĀGĪ IN INDIAN CULTURE

In all of the great Indian religions the female figure termed as *nāgī* or *nāginī*, worshipped as *nāgamātā* (i.e., Mother-Serpent) when acting as a Śākta cult object, is the quintessence of both the serpent's and the great Goddess' Soma nature. The *nāgī* is conceived as a female serpent genius or deity who bestows fertility, dispels sterility and heals sickness. She is an aquatic, nocturnal and chthonic supernatural being symbolising the primeval sanctity concentrated in the water element.[73]

The symbolic significance of the *nāgī* is almost an equivalent of that of fish, being the latter animal traditionally conceived in India as a sort of 'water snake'. Fish, a cold-blooded creature inhabiting the depths of the ocean like the *nāga*s of the myth, was regarded since the pre-historic epoch as a symbol of the feminine. During the Neolithic period, owing to its anatomic shape and damp qualities, it was chosen as the perfect symbol of the uterus of the earth-goddess, the dispenser of the sap of life, regeneration and perpetual transformation.[74] To confine the discussion to India, the figure of the Tamilian Hindu goddess Mīnākṣī of Madurai, whose name means 'the Fish-eyed', seemingly represents the remainder of an ancient female-oriented cultic complex centred round the holiness of fish.[75] Such a religious tradition might have evolved out of some cultural contacts between the ancient inhabitants of South India and the Austric peoples of South-East Asia. Some Indonesian and Indo-Chinese myths trace the respective origin of a number of local royal dynasties back to the union of a man with a 'fish-smelling' *nāgī*,[76] with this possibly suggesting that the fecundity-waters-royalty complex, personified by goddess Lakṣmī in medieval Hinduism, was originally related, at least in part, to the Austric cultural stream. Even the Satyavatī of the *Mahābhārata*, the fish-smelling girl — she herself, born from a she-fish — who generates all of the royal leading characters of the great epic,[77] may be associated with the same mythic tradition. The *nāgī*, both in India and South-East Asia, appears to be, among other things, also a personification of the nocturnal, aqueous and ophidic aspect of royalty, opposed to the latter's solar aspect.

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[72] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-6.

[73] M. Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, p. 351.

[74] B. Bhattacharya, *Śaivism and the Phallic World*, New Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta, 1975, I, p. 17; M. Gimbutas, *Il linguaggio della Dea. Mito e culto della Dea Madre nell'Europa neolitica*, Milano, 1990, pp. 258-63.

[75] A. Daniélou, *Storia dell'India*, p. 30.

[76] M. Eliade, *Trattato di storia delle religioni*, p. 217.

Thus, just like the Hindu goddess Lakṣmī — who, since the *Rāmāyaṇa* times, is said to have arisen from the Ocean — the *nāgī* and her equivalent the she-fish embody in India the pre-Vedic religious concept according to which the sacred cosmic waters were regarded as the source of all powers (fertility, fecundity, prosperity, sovereignty, sanctity, mysteriosophical knowledge, immortality, etc.).[78] These powers — termed as *śakti*s in the Hindu terminology — are the great Goddess' treasures, guarded by the *nāga*s, which are symbolised in literature and art by the gem (*maṇi*) inserted on the holy cobra's head, by the jewels and crowns adorning all of the *nāga* images, or by the pot full of precious offerings held by the latter with their hands in front of the chest.

Indian religious thought suggested in all ages an identification of the themes serpent-woman-*śakti-māyā*-spiritual illumination. In the art sphere such interrelated themes were artistically synthesised in a masterly manner in the iconographic motif of the *nāgī*, which appeared for the first time on the stone rails of the Buddhist *stūpa*s erected in the last centuries of the pre-Christian era.

NĀGAMĀTĀS OF ORISSA

The earliest extant images of *nāgamātā*s, meant as independent cult deities conforming to the iconography of the *nāgī*, date in Orissa from around the second century BC. (*fig.* 46) They are represented by a pair of colossal *nāgī* figures, perhaps originally installed in a Buddhist cult edifice, which are at present worshipped along with the image of a *nāgarāja* as the triune *grāma-devatā* of the village of Sundarpada (outskirts of Bhubaneswar). Both these anthropomorphic *nāgī*s stand out in a rigid pose and severe attitude against the heavy and massive coils of a polycephalous snake, whose head, appearing above theirs, is five-hooded. They wear heavy ornaments and have squattish bodies, bulbous breasts, bulging hips, large thighs, round faces and flat noses. Such iconographic characters indicate that these deities were conceived as ophidic manifestations of the female principle modelled after the racial features of the indigenous women of Orissa. Along with some coeval images of *yakṣī*s (the female geniuses of nature) found in the vicinity of Bhubaneswar, these two presumably Buddhist *nāgī* images definitely represent the earliest Śākta objects of worship in iconic form having been discovered in Orissa so far.[79] The *nāgī* images at Sundarpada indicate, by their hoary antiquity, that the earliest sculptural remains related to Śakti cult to be found in Orissa are, rather significantly, associated with Nāga cult. During the medieval period in Orissa such archaic *nāgamātā* images in anthropomorphic form were generally replaced by the therio-anthropomorphic images of *nāgakanyās*, minor independent cult deities depicted as beautiful women having a canopy of serpent hoods over their head and a serpent tail replacing the lower portion of their body. (*fig.* 47) Most of Orissan Hindu temples, particularly the Śaiva ones, have the images of such female ophidic deities carved in a profusion on their external walls. *Nāgakanyās* are often paired with *nāgarājas*, along with whom, in some cases, they display amorous postures (*mithunas*), which were a typical feature of the medieval Hindu temple art of Orissa. (*fig.* 49)

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[77] J. Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, New Delhi, reprint 1973, p. 288.

[78] M. Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

[79] H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXX, Nos. 2, 3 and 4: Glimpses of Orissan Art and Culture, pp. 95 and 108.

It is no wonder that the worship of *nāgamātās* initially developed in Orissa within the Buddhist fold, in that the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition knows a female serpent deity, named Jāṅgulī (She-of-Poison), who is claimed to be as old as Buddha himself. It is believed by the followers of that faith, that the secrets relating to the goddess in question were taught by Buddha to his disciple Ānanda. Even though it is not certain at all that the antiquity of Jāṅgulī as a Buddhist deity goes back to the time of the historical Buddha, yet it seems that this *nāgamātā*, probably representing an entire class of serpent goddesses anciently worshipped by different tribal peoples of India, was admitted with all honours into the Buddhist pantheon in a fairly early period.[80]

That the esoteric knowledge included in pre-Vedic serpent-lore was given the greatest importance by the Buddhists is demonstrated by the well-known fact, that the teachings of the monk Nāgārjuna, which gave rise to the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism in the first centuries of the Christian era, were said to have been revealed to him directly by the *nāgas*, who, in their turn, were believed to have received the teachings at issue from Buddha himself some centuries earlier. Therefore, as in the case of the Sāṁkhya-*darśana* — whose doctrines were traditionally reported to have been conceived by the mythical sage Kapila after the study of the ancient wisdom of the *asuras* (the pre-Vedic gods)[81] — also Mahāyāna Buddhism, which became one of the dominant faiths in Orissa in the first centuries of the Christian era, indirectly asserted to have inherited the ancient knowledge of the earlier inhabitants of India (designated, in this case, as Doctrine of Serpent). Therefore, to the eyes of Buddhist devotees, goddess Jāṅgulī could well have represented a personified synthesis of the ancient non-Āryan esoteric knowledge, which seems to have been originally related, to a great extent, with ophidic cults.

The cult of Jāṅgulī was probably much widespread in Orissa in ancient times, as it can be evinced by the fact that a number of Hindu *nāgamātās* — chief among whom is Manasā

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[80] P.K. Maity, *Historical Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasā*, Calcutta, 1966, pp. 224 and 228.

[81] A. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, New York, 1964, p. 182.

— or of goddesses being, at any rate, associated with snakes (such as, for instance, the awesome Cāmuṇḍā), are presently worshipped as *grāma-devatās* in Orissan villages under the name of Jāgulei, which appears to be a later corruption of Jāṅgulī. The Hindu cult of Manasā, which will be more articulately discussed in a subsequent chapter, apparently developed in Orissa in the early medieval period side by side with the Buddhist cult of Jāṅgulī starting from the common religious basis formed by some pre-existing non-Āryan ophidic cults.

The importance got by Nāga cult in Orissa in times past is evident from the circumstance that this State has the largest concentration of cult images of *nāgas* and *nāgīs* in the whole of India.[82] Nāga cult existed with unbroken continuity in Orissa from pre-historic times till the present days. Innumerable beautiful images of *nāgas* and *nāgīs* adorn the walls of medieval Orissan temples, while their frequent depiction as being engaged in *mithunas* (amorous postures) testify to their Tāntric significance. Different medieval cult icons of gods and goddesses from the Brāhmaṇical, Buddhist and Jaina pantheons, having a canopy of serpent hoods carved above the head, are found in abundance in the State. Nāga deities still continue to dominate the religious horizon of both the Hindu low-caste people and the tribal communities of Orissa. Folk festivals meant for the propitiation of these divine beings, such as *Nāga Pañcamī* and *Jāgulei Pañcamī*, allied with the Śaiva and with the Śākta creed respectively,[83] show that the original characteristics of primitive ophiolatry are more or less still intact in Orissa, even though, in course of time, they have merged into popular Hinduism.

The very prominent position enjoyed in ancient Kaliṅga by Nāga cult, when read in the light of the above-discussed links of this cult with the pre-historic culture complex centred round the worship of Mother Earth, explains why serpent symbolism has been very frequently associated in this region with female-centred myths as well as with the Śākta iconography. Such a kind of religio-cultural link is traceable in Orissa either in the tribal mythology about the origin of snakes and in the concepts about the Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina goddesses associated with snakes. This may indicate that there was no solution of continuity between the indigenous forms of serpent-worship and the later Āryanised forms of *nāgamātā*-worship. It is not by chance that many old images of serpent goddesses, worshipped as *grāma-devatās* in Hindu villages, are nowadays jointly propitiated by the Hindu folk and the tribal communities of Orissa to ward off snake bites.

As far as the tribal serpent-lore of Orissa is concerned, it is to be noticed here that many a tribal legend collected by V. Elwin in this State connects the origin of snakes with mythical women who are often said to have died a violent death. This mythic complex, thus, bears some analogy with the one centring round the origins of the ill-giving goddesses of the tribals, which has been discussed above. The legends at issue variously trace the origin of snakes to the hair, intestines, umbilical cord or necklace of a woman, all of these objects having a serpentine shape.[84] These tribal legends reflect the pristine association of woman with the serpent, an association which, from another point of view, is crystallised in the autochthonous female-oriented cults devoted to ancient figures of *nāgamātās* or Mothers-Serpent.

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[82] S.C. Panda, *Nāga Cult in Orissa,* Delhi, 1986, p. 114.

[83] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, pp. 186 and 193-4.

Nāgamātās are currently venerated in various forms by the indigenous tribes of Orissa, especially the Dravidian-speaking ones. For instance, the Kondh Doras of Koraput district worship the seven Serpent Sisters (Sambatsap),[85] which fact appears very interesting when confronted with the folk cult of the seven Sisters (the givers of various diseases) venerated in the Dravidian countries or with the medieval Hindu cult of Saptamātṛkās (the seven Divine Mothers of Tantrism). The Kuttia Kondhs of Ganjam district, on the other hand, believe that their earth-goddess, Nirantali, uses to sleep upon a bed of cobras born from a rock against which the goddess herself had one day urinated. Nirantali is furthermore said to have given snakes their venom.[86] The cult of Khetta, prevailing among the Oraons, can be assimilated to a primitive form of *nāgamātā* cult.[87]

The Gonds living in the districts of Kalahandi and Sundargarh and their tribal kinsmen settled in Bastar (Madhya Pradesh) have been worshipping *nāgamātās* since the hoary past. The medieval Gond rulers of Kalahandi, who claimed themselves to be the descendants of the legendary Nāga race (the human, not the divine one), had goddess Maṇikeśvarī, originally worshipped in aniconic form, as their family deity. The name of this goddess is the same as Maṇināgeśvarī, the Lady-of-the-Bejewelled Cobra[88] (in Sanskrit, the term *maṇika* has the same meaning as *maṇi*, i.e., a gem). Another ancient royal dynasty of Orissa of the self-styled Nāga lineage, the Vairāṭa Bhūjaṅgas, who ruled over the present district of Mayurbhanj in the early medieval period, installed *nāgamātās* at different sites and in different forms as their own tutelary deities.[89] The *rājās* of Ranpur in the Nayagarh sub-division of Puri district accepted a tribal serpent-goddess, by them renamed Maṇināga Devī, as the tutelary deity of their family. This goddess seems to have been initially worshipped in the form of a piece of stone. She was once regularly offered human sacrifices. Also the name of the latter goddess lays emphasis on the archaic religious symbolism embodied by the mythical figure of the Bejewelled Cobra.

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[84] V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, pp. 293-302.

[85] *Ibid.*, pp. 296-7.

[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 298-9.

[87] S.C. Panda, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-7.

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[89] *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 19, 60-1 and 81.

The circumstance for which a number of autochthonous serpent-goddesses of inland Orissa were raised during the medieval period to the status of tutelary deity (*iṣṭa-devatā*) of this or that Hinduised ruling family of the non-Āryan origin possibly indicates that *nāgamātās* were, as above-stated, initially associated with the pre-Āryan ideology about the origin of royal authority from mythical ophidic ancestors. A similar ideology underlies the legendary narrative of the descent of the ruling family of the Chota Nagpur kingdom (mainly inhabited by tribes of the Munda stock), the Nāgavaṁśīs or Dynasty of the Serpent, from the mythical *nāgarāja* Puṇḍarīka.[90]

Ophidic symbolism, with all what it implies, is associated in iconography with a number of Hindu goddesses of medieval Orissa. For instance, Vimalā of Puri holds a small figure of a mermaid (a *nāgakanyā*?) with her upper left hand,[91] while Virajā of Jajpur has a cobra with the lower part coiled and the raised head expanded carved on her head.[92] The terrific goddess Cāmuṇḍā is often depicted in Orissa with a cobra's head inserted in her coiffure; in this case, the snake, replacing the human skull that is carved in other examples above the goddess' forehead, may be even considered a symbol of death. Death symbolism is also attached to the *nāga-pāśa* (a noose formed by a living snake) brandished as a weapon by Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, the slayer of the buffalo-demon, in most of her images found in Orissa, as well as in most of those found in the Deccan. This attribute of the Goddess (the material prototype of which was perhaps the noose anciently used by some non-Āryan tribes for combat)[93] is, in fact, a Tāntric transformation of the *pāśa* of the Vedic god of death Yama, who was believed to use it to ensnare the creatures who had reached their time of dying. When Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, in a subsequent period, was given a place of pre-eminence in the Hindu pantheon, her *nāga-pāśa* acquired a symbolic meaning analogous to that of Yama's noose.[94] However, it is interesting to notice, in this connection, that Yama's *pāśa* of is said to have originally belonged to Varuṇa, the Vedic god of waters, whose figure appears to be somehow connected with pre-Vedic ophidic cults. The attribution of the weapon known as *nāga-pāśa* to Durgā seems, therefore, to have originated in the ambit of the same non-Āryan religious complex that also included Nāga cult.

It can be concluded that the serpent, when appearing — in Orissa as elsewhere in India — as a subordinate element in the iconography of the Goddess, can be either a symbol or life or of death. At any rate, this mythic animal always acted as a symbol of transformation and regeneration, as it has been always the norm since pre-historic times.

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[90] E.T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnography of Bengal*, Calcutta, reprint 1960, pp. 164-5.

[91] K.C. Mishra, *The Cult of Jagannātha*, 2nd edn., Calcutta, 1984, p. 112.

[92] S.C. Panda, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[93] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *Dizionario dell'Induismo*, Roma, 1980, p. 291.

[94] From a letter of Prof. M. Biardeau to the present writer.

Links between Śakti and Yakṣa cults

The mysterious beings called *yakṣas*, common to the Brāhmaṇical, Buddhist and Jaina religions, were probably the vegetable godlings of the pre-historic peoples of India. Even though they were ignored by the early Vedic tradition, these vegetation spirits, associated with the cyclic character of seasons and the fertility of soil, were nevertheless unceasingly venerated in all ages by the mass of people of the non-Āryan origin. Everywhere in India, the presence of a *yakṣa* was believed to ensure the prosperity of a village. They were believed to frequent forests and, more in general, uncivilised areas. Their cult, being associated with the mysterious and irrepressible powers of growth and fertility, was probably officiated in ancient times both by men and women, as it was the case with Nāga cult too. *Yakṣas* were often, and are still today, honoured by stone altars or tablets placed under sacred trees far away from the village, the earliest representations of which are possibly depicted on some seals and chiselled stones dating from the epoch of the Indus Valley civilisation. Their female counterparts, called *yakṣīs* (a class of dryads dwelling in the forest and symbolising the life sap of vegetation) can be collectively taken as one of the probable archetypes of the Divine Mother or Śakti. The primordial link between the female principle and the tree is artistically expressed in the above-mentioned Indus Valley archaeological remains, some of which represent a female figure flanked by tree branches.[95]

The fertility symbolism embodied by the *yakṣas* in their quality as the Lords of Life is wider than the one embodied by the *nāgas*: in fact, while the latter influence only waters, the former influence all kind of life sap, including the lymph of plants and the seed of animals and men. As in the case of Nāga-worship, this type of fertility cult appears to be intimately connected with the primitive form of religion centring round the divine figure of Mother Earth, conceived as the dispenser of both life and death.

Yakṣas are traditionally believed to reside in fields and forests, their abode being located inside some particularly sacred tree. To the eyes of primitive man, trees were the chief representatives of the power of vegetation — and, more in general, of vegetative life — spreading all over the world. They were thought to be endowed with spirit and sense-organs, just like animals. In the later religious conceptions diffused among the aboriginal peoples of India, the universal divine spirit residing in the trees was sub-divided into a multitude of anthropomorphic *genii loci*, who were regarded as the protectors of local tribal communities and the dispensers of wealth to them.[96] The historical religions of India subsequently absorbed this class of autochthonous cults and named those popular *genii loci* as *yakṣas*, a Sanskrit word of doubtful etymology, translated by A. Daniélou as 'the Mysterious Ones'.[97] The very choice of such a name shows that later Vedic authors were not familiar with these folk divinities-spirits, who were accordingly regarded by them as marvellous and enigmatic manifestations of the divine, often displaying a malignant rather than benevolent character.

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[95] M. Stutley, *Hinduism: The Eternal Law*, New Delhi, 1993, p. 50; D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 16 and 25-6; R. M. Cimino, 'Le Yoginī ed i loro luoghi di culto', *Rivista degli studi orientali*, Roma, vol. LV (1981), p. 40.

[96] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. Veda e antico Induismo*, Milano, 1981, pp. 406 and 412-3.

A.K. Coomaraswamy considers it probable that the later cult images of Śiva, Gaṇeśa, and some forms of the Devī — chief among them, the Mātṛkās and the Yoginīs — were modelled in *yakṣa* forms of the tribal type, characterised by large proportions and heavy earthly forms.[98] Also the iconographic type of the river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā, whose paired images began to serve as door-keepers in Hindu temples of different sectarian affiliation starting from the Gupta age, might derive from that of *yakṣīs*.[99]

YAKṢA-YAKṢĪ IN ANCIENT ORISSA

The most ancient, diffused and important sculptural type testifying to the *yakṣī*'s association with fertility is the *śālabhañjikā* or woman-and-tree motif, in which a *yakṣī* in human form is depicted as embracing the trunk of a tree with one of her arms and as bending downwards one of its branches with the other while she is gently kicking the tree near the roots with one of her feet, bringing it to immediate flowering. This motif symbolises the stimulation of the tree's generative power by means of the terrestrial energy embodied by the female figure. *Śālabhañjikās* were considered to be the human incarnations of nature's motherly energy, namely, projections of the universal Śakti as life-giving power (*prakṛti*). They represent, at one time, also the fertility of the tree in which they become incarnated as *yakṣīs*. When performed by ordinary women at trees considered to be sacred, the practice represented in the *śālabhañjikā* motif, consisting in a magical union of the female principle with the mysterious forces of nature, was meant as a fertility rite aimed at causing the performer's pregnancy. This magic ritual, whose origins are lost in the mists of Indian pre-history, was most likely the primal source of the woman-and-tree motif itself.[100]

The superstitious attribution of the faculty of making barren women fertile to *yakṣīs*[101] probably occasioned, in subsequent times, the attribution of a similar power to certain Hindu goddesses, the most popular among whom is Ṣaṣṭhī Devī, the giver and patroness of children. In this last connection, it must be noted that the Hindus of Orissa celebrate a festival, called *Jyeṣṭha Śukla Ṣaṣṭhī* (the sixth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Jyeṣṭha, i.e.,

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[97] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[98] A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Washington, 1928, Pt. I, pp. 9 and 29; N. N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[99] R.M. Cimino, *art. cit.*, p. 39.

[100] H. Zimmer, *Miti e simboli dell'India*, Milano, 1993, pp. 69-71.

[101] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 503.

May-June), on the occasion of which the people worship this deity under the name of Āraṇyaka Ṣaṣṭhī, namely, the Ṣaṣṭhī-Dwelling-in-the-Forest.[102] Such a name may be the reminiscence of the original *yakṣī* character of Ṣaṣṭhī Devī.

Though they appeared on the monuments of other parts of India (such as on the relieves of the Buddhist *stūpas* at Bharhut and Sanchi) already during the Śuṅga epoch (second-first century BC), *yakṣī* images of the *śālabhañjikā* sub-type made their first appearance in Orissa only in the seventh century AD, being depicted in abundance on the walls of some medieval Śaiva and Śākta temples located in Bhubaneswar such as the Paraśurāmeśvara, Vaitāl, Mukteśvara and Gaurī temples. This circumstance is quite strange in view of the fact, that Yakṣa cult, from which this class of images drew inspiration, must have been no doubt one of the most diffused forms of religion among the semi-tribal rural communities of ancient Kaliṅga. It cannot be, however, excluded that future archaeological finds may bridge the gap of centuries between the early Buddhist *śālabhañjikā* images of Middle India and the medieval Hindu sculptures of Orissa representing the same motif. At any rate, the antiquity of Yakṣa cult in Orissa is evinced by the presence of a number of miniature *yakṣa* images of the Sanchi type in the Udayagiri and Khandagiri rock-cut caves near Bhubaneswar, as well as by some free-standing statues, modelled quite in the same forms, discovered by K.C. Panigrahi in the Bhubaneswar area. All these sculptures present archaic iconographic features (the frontal pose, bulged-out bellies, heavy body ornaments, etc.) that closely relate them to the early Buddhist *yakṣa* images of Middle India. They most likely date from the period of the supposed Sātavāhana supremacy in ancient Kaliṅga, roughly comprised between the first century BC and the first century AD. Since Sanchi was under the rule of that Āndhra dynasty, it appears probable that the *yakṣa* images at issue were modelled on the patterns of the Sanchi ones owing to cultural contacts between Āndhra and Kaliṅga.[103] In addition to *yakṣa* images, several *yakṣī* images, dating from about the second century BC, were discovered in the area of Bhubaneswar, and are now preserved in its State Museum. The crude and primitive iconographic features of these sculptures, probably modelled on tribal specimens, are akin to those of the coeval *nāgī*s of Sundarpada, of which mention has been made in the preceding section. Along with the latter, these *yakṣī*s represent the earliest extant Śākta cult images in anthropomorphic form discovered in Orissa so far.[104]

The emergence of Yakṣa cult in its tree-worship aspect is possibly witnessed, as regards ancient Kaliṅga, by a Jaina bas-relief depicting a group of men and women dancing round a sacred tree, which is found among the sculptures of Udayagiri and has been dated to the first century BC.[105] Moreover, even the worship of female deities represented by poles, established at a very early date in Orissa, may be considered as a contracted form of tree-worship. Worship of sacred trees, generally associated with some *yakṣī* or with some Hindu folk goddess (e.g., with Maṅgalā), is still nowadays an important feature of Orissan popular Śāktism. Furthermore, Orissan *grāma-devatā* shrines are almost invariably placed under a large sacred *pīpal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*), this being a common occurrence in south India too. The tradition of installing the representative icons of village goddesses under sacred trees can be likewise related to Yakṣa cult.

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[102] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, pp. 76-7.

[103] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40 and 366-7.

[104] H.C. Das, *art. cit.*, p. 108.

The eminent goddess Samalei of Sambalpur probably borrowed her name from the *simul* or *simli* tree (*Bombax malabaricum*), which is first of all the sacred tree of the Hindu god of death, Yama, but which is also sacred to the Austro-Asiatic Gadabas and Bondos of Orissa, who use to sacrifice bovines (buffaloes, bulls), tied to branches of this tree that are planted into the ground, on the occasion of the celebration of some important megalithic ceremonies held in commemoration of the deceased relatives.[106] The Mundas, communities of whom are found settled in the Sambalpur area, have a spring-hunting rite during which they ceremonially burn *simul* branches to propitiate their goddess of the forest and of wild animals, Birchandi.[107] Thus, goddess Samalei of Sambalpur appears to represent an important specimen of a very archaic tree-deity or *yakṣī,* associated with ritual spring-hunting and forest-clearing or also with ancestor-worship and the sacrifice of bovines, who became incorporated in the Śākta pantheon of Orissa from earlier tribal cults. Again with respect to tree-goddess cult in Orissa, the famous *Karam* festival,[108] observed by most of the tribal communities settled in the northern regions of the State together with local Hindu folk, is pivoted upon the propitiation of a divinity — the male Karam Deota or, even more frequently, the female Karamsāṇī Devī — who is believed to reside in the sacred branches of the *karam* tree (*Shorea robusta*), and who is, therefore, assimilable to a *yakṣa* or *yakṣī* figure. Finally, the tree-goddess Vana-Durgā, i.e., Durgā-of-the-Forest, associated with the ghost tree (*piśācadruma*), that is specially worshipped by women,[109] enjoys a cult of her own — or is, alternatively, addressed with a special *mantra* during the rites being performed in honour of other goddesses — at several Śākta shrines of Orissa.

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[105] P. Mohanty-Hejmadi, *art. cit.*, p. 298.

[106] R.P. Mohapatra, *Temple Legends of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1989, p. 98; C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, 'Megalithic Ritual among the Gadabas and the Bondos of Orissa', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal — Letters*, vol. IX (1943), pp. 152-8, 166-70; V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 124, n. 1; Id., *Bondo Highlander*, London, 1950, pp. 219 ff.

[107] R. Rahmann, 'The Ritual Spring Hunt of Northeastern and Middle India', *Anthropos*, vol. XLVII (1952), p. 874.

[108] D.N. Patnaik, *Festivals of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1982, pp. 79-80.

[109] M. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

The vegetable aspect of Durgā, connected with the ancient tribal forms of tree-worship associated with Yakṣa cult, is furthermore stressed in Orissa on the occasion of the annual *Durgā-Pūjā*, during which the *Navapatrikā* ceremony is held at some Śākta shrines of the State, chief among which is Virajā temple at Jajpur.[110] This well-known ceremony consists in the propitiation of the nine plants bound together so as to form the silhouette of a female deity. Each plant is associated with a different form of the great Goddess. It appears clear that *Navapatrikā*-worship is a reminiscence of the earlier tree-worship of the indigenous peoples of the Indian sub-continent, in which the energies of nine forms of Durgā (Navadurgās) are combined together to represent the supreme goddess of crops and vegetation in an anthropomorphic form. Under this aspect of hers, Durgā is regarded as the personification of the vegetable kingdom, including within herself the combined powers of all *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs*.

YAKSA-YAKṢĪ'S MALEVOLENT ASPECT

So far in the present section only the beneficent, fertilising and life-giving aspect of *yakṣa-yaksī* has been discussed. It is now important to make some reference to their maleficent aspect, which is of no lesser importance as to the origin and development of Śakti cult.

Like other supernatural beings conceived in India, *yakṣas* may be benevolent or malevolent toward man. This enigmatic ambivalence is also characteristic of most of the Hindu goddesses associated with Śiva, who was regarded since ancient times as the overlord of *yakṣas* and the companion and friend of their king, Kubera.[111] That the original character of *yakṣas* included also a malignant disposition, corresponding to the negative forces of nature, is evinced by some Purāṇic passages in which these beings are classified along with the *piśācas* and *bhūtas*, the gruesome supernatural frequenters of cremation grounds. Furthermore, they are often mentioned with the demoniacal *rākṣasas* as well, even though it is also narrated that, at a certain time, they seceded from the latter with Kubera at their head to join the gods.[112]

Some *yakṣas* were, and are still today, believed to cause insanity and other diseases.[113] This side of their character most likely derives from the earlier tribal conception of maleficent spirits and divinities (akin to the *bongas* worshipped by the Munda tribes) giving man various terrible diseases; on the other hand, also some Śākta folk deities, such as the goddess of smallpox in her various manifestations, *grāma-devatās* in their wrathful aspect, or *yoginīs* in their particular appearance as ogresses, are currently taken in India, and particularly in

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[110] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, p. 4.

[111] J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 413; A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

[112] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 503; A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[113] M. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

Orissa, as responsible for attacks of mental and physical sickness. Therefore, under this particular aspect of its, the cult of *yakṣas* might well represent a sort of religio-cultural bridge connecting the ancient ill-giving demons and divinities of the tribals with the later Hindu pantheon. Especially the female representatives of this class of demi-gods, namely, *yakṣīs*, are often described as dangerous beings, as it was the case with some forms of the Devī from the Gupta period onwards. *Yakṣīs* are often depicted in ancient texts as female genii of the air who afflict or take possession of children. Such a malignant disposition associates them to the Buddhist goddess Hārītī, the Children-Stealer, indicated in some Buddhist myths as the divine mother of all *yakṣas*.[114] Some female evil spirits, akin in conception to ancient *yakṣīs*, are still now propitiated in Orissa by the mothers of a family in order that they do not come at night to afflict their children with illness. This is the case, just to give an example, with the female spirit known as Tandei, who is particularly feared by the Hindu peasants of Sambalpur district.[115]

It appears probable that, in order to satisfy the cruel side of their mysterious and inscrutable character, *yakṣas* were propitiated in ancient times through bloody sacrifices, just as the ill-giving divinities of the tribals or, among the Hindu folk, some forms of Śiva and the Devī. In fact, the *Matsya Purāṇa* gives an account of the ancient Yakṣa cult as observed in Banaras, in which is recorded that these demi-gods were presented with offerings of flesh and blood.[116] The very practice of offering flesh and blood to a Hindu goddess, when looked upon as a whole, may have had its root cause in Yakṣa cult. As a proof of this D.L. Eck puts forward the increasing use, still today in full working order vogue in Banaras, of vermilion paste in the propitiation of both Yakṣa and Devī images, considering that substance to be a substitute for blood.[117]

To explain the religious meaning of the use of red colour as an equivalent of blood in both Yakṣa and Śakti cults, a short digression must be made on the magico-symbolical significance of the red colour in ancient cultures, including the Indian one. Due to its sumptuousness, splendour and high cost of production, red is the colour of royalty and power. This is also the colour of wrath, warfare and destruction, in that it reminds the blood poured on battlefields, the flame of fires set to besieged places, the excitation of faces during combat. The kṣatriyas, forming the warrior elite of ancient India, were attributed this colour as a symbol of their social status, like the ancient Roman officers and soldiers. In Indian iconography and aesthetical sensibility the red colour traditionally denotes the furious sentiment (*raudra-rasa*). But red is, above all, the colour of life, vigour, strength and energy inasmuch as it is the colour of blood. The complex of magico-symbolical meanings associated with the colour red is one of the cultural factors that, in proto-historic times, gave rise to the ritual use of the blood of sacrificial victims, animal or human, for reddening, and in this way potentiating, the icons of those divinities, who were considered to influence the fertility of nature and man, as well as a community's or a nation's success in war.

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[114] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 137; A. K. Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*, Pt. I, p. 9.

[115] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[116] V.S. Agrawala, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

[117] D.L. Eck, *Banaras, City of Light*, New York, 1982, p. 52.

Later on the vitalising, nourishing and regenerating qualities of blood were ritually transferred to other red substances and objects of various type, which were consequently assigned some magical qualities, beneficent or maleficent according to the context in which the worship of a deity was resorted to. In several areas of the Ancient World, blood offerings were, thus, replaced by the offering of red wine, fruits and flowers. Such symbolical substitutes for blood-offering could be aimed either at appeasing benevolently an angry and blood-thirsty deity or, alternatively, at exciting the latter's anger and thirst for blood in order to profit malevolently by its magical power.[118] As far as India is concerned, the magnificent vermilion-coloured flower of the *mandāra* plant (*Hibiscus Rosa-sinensis*), associated with either the idea of blood and that of fertility (suggested by its resembling in shape and form the erect penis set in the open vulva),[119] was increasingly used, beginning from very early times, in the worship of female tree-deities (*yakṣīs*) and, even more so, in that of the various forms of the Devī. In the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, the latter is said to love particularly red flowers.[120] In Orissa, hibiscus flowers are abundantly employed in the propitiation of all Śākta images.

Another important substitute for blood-offering in the ritual practices related to Yakṣa and Śakti cults was vermilion or cinnabar, a preparation of mercury with sulphur which was termed as *hiṅgula* in ancient Sanskrit texts, and as *sindūra* starting from the Moghul period. Cinnabar was also employed by the ancient Romans for reddening the face of the statue of Jupiter, their chief divinity, on some particular ceremonial occasions.[121] Among the ancient Phoenicians it was minium, another red substance, that in later times replaced blood in the ritual reddening of the statues of gods.[122] One of the most eminent Śākta deities of Orissa, Hiṅgulā, worshipped in the Talcher area (Dhenkanal district), takes her very name from the circumstance of her cult image being regularly besmeared with vermilion paste. Her name can be, indeed, translated as 'She-of-Vermilion'.

In Orissa there is no evidence of bloody sacrifices having been once associated with Yakṣa cult, as it was probably the rule in ancient Banaras; this notwithstanding, the tribal tradition of animal sacrifice, performed in honour of malevolent spirits and deities inhabiting in nature, who are likely to represent the most direct archetypes of *yakṣas*, is still alive in the State. As stated by V. Elwin, 'the entire Orissa countryside is saturated in the idea that the earth cries out for blood and that blood will bring fertility and plenty'.[123] The great majority of tribal godlings to be found in Orissa are fond of blood. Goats, pigs, fowls, peacocks, buffaloes, and in some cases even bullocks, are the animals being normally used. This sacrificial activity is generally related to fertility cults as well as to the propitiation of the dead ancestors, who are traditionally identified with the earth, regarded as the latter's abode after death. Goats, fowls and buffaloes, as it is well-known, are also the favourite sacrificial animals of the great Goddess of the Hindus in her various manifestations, which, as is believed by a large section of scholars, appear to have originated, as a whole, from pre-historic Mother Earth cultus. The interrelations between the tribal and the Śākta mode of sacrificing animals to female deities are discussed in the last chapter of the present work, which also includes a section on the points of contact between the tribal and the Śākta mode of performing human sacrifice, offered in either case, till recent times, in honour of blood-thirsty female deities.

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[118] L. Luzzatto and R. Pompas, *Il significato dei colori nelle civiltà antiche*, Milano, 1988, p. 224.

[119] B. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, I, p. 115.

[120] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. L'Induismo recente*, p. 325.

[121] L. Colombo, *I colori degli antichi*, Fiesole, 1995, pp. 85 and 120.

[122] L. Luzzatto and R. Pompas, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

The above-described ritual substitution of blood-offering with vermilion paste was historically applied in Orissa to both Yakṣa and Śakti cults. The great majority of the cult icons of the Devī in Orissa have been regularly applied, since the time of their installation in the respective shrines, with a thick coat of vermilion paste on the face, which unfortunately caused, in most cases, the original facial traits of those images to be permanently defaced beyond recognition. The same ritual practice is adopted in the worship of the so-called 'self-generated', i.e., aniconic, images of the Devī.

Similarly, vermilion paste is regularly applied by the Oriyā villagers on the 'self-generated' *yakṣī* images, generally represented by natural wounds on the trunks of holy trees that may either present swollen edges, suggesting the shape of a female sex-organ, or an oval form, suggesting that of a female face. (*fig.* 65) Many big banyan trees of Orissa have their roots besmeared with vermilion paste and are applied with silver eyes, with this immediately indicating, to those who approach them, the presence of a *yakṣī* or *yakṣī* shrine under them. Hundreds of red rags, dry flower garlands and votive clay figurines of elephants or horses (the latter are known as *mātāghoṛās*) are often placed under those most sacred trees. In some cases, female tree-deities are regarded as manifestations of Maṅgalā, an auspicious folk goddess venerated all over Orissa. This circumstance constitutes a further evidence of the existence in Orissa of ancient links between Śakti cult and the veneration of *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs*.

Śakti cult and tribal shamanism

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[123] V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, p. 188.

Shamanism has always represented an important element in the religions of different Orissan tribes, and especially in that of the Hill Saoras, settled in the south-western part of the State. At the same time, traces of shamanistic rituals and beliefs are noticed in connection with Śakti cult in many areas of Orissa. Accepting the view according to which the semi-Hinduised Saoras, presently settled in Orissa's alluvial plains and living in proximity to Hindu villages, formed in ancient times one ethnic group with the still fully tribal Hill Saoras, the presence of the confuse remainders of shamanistic cultures within the fold of Śakti cult might be explained by making reference to the cultural influence exerted since the hoary past by that very important and numerous Austro-Asiatic tribe of Orissa on the Oriyā villagers, who formed in all ages the bulk of the devotees of the great Goddess.

Sorcery is now practised on a large scale by the semi-Hinduised Saoras of the plains, but yet it does not seem to belong to the genuine cultural inheritance of the historical Saora people; it appears, on the contrary, to represent a later corruption of the shamanistic culture of the Saoras, the responsibility for which may be attributed to the fascinating influence exerted on those tribesmen by the black-magic practices of the Kondhs.[124] The quintessence of the ancient Saora religion, which appears to have influenced a good deal of ritual practices diffused among the Oriya Śāktas, is actually represented by shamanism, which has little to share with sorcery or black-magic.

In the Indian context, a shaman can be defined as a half-priestly figure, a man or woman who, though normally carrying on some non-religious activity, can on some particular occasions assume a sacred function and act as the intermediary between deities (or ancestral spirits) and men to the advantage of the single or of the entire community. Shamans and shamanins are in possession of techniques of ecstasy they usually display in a ritualistic way with the support of the dance associated with the ingestion of drugs or wines, causing them some states of trance. The main purpose of the activity of an Indian tribal shaman is to suggest the people what the gods or the spirits of the dead want to get from them in exchange for their recovering one's health or remedying the disastrous consequences of natural calamities such as epidemics, famines, hurricanes, floods, etc. The original connection of Indian tribal shamanism with fertility magic (associated, in all probability, with the pre-historic culture complex that also included Mother Earth cultus) may be indicated by the stirring of rice in the winnowing fan as the main way resorted to by tribal shamans to induce trance. The oracular responses uttered by Indian tribal shamans and shamanins, as still today observable among the Hill Saoras and other Munda-speaking tribes of Middle India, are always accompanied by the roll of this typical fan, a shovel-shaped agricultural implement normally used to ventilate grains. Despite its having a fundamentally magical character, the activity of an Indian tribal shaman or shamanin usually also includes a medical aspect, under which he or she can be really helpful to the people so far as the cure of their diseases is concerned.[125]

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[124] *Ibid.*, pp. 232 and 242.

The chief points of contact between the shamanistic cultures of eastern India, especially the Saora one, and the non-Brāhmaṇical religious practices diffused among the Oriyā low-caste devotees of the great Goddess, can be synthesised as follows.

SHAMANISTIC FIGURES

In almost every village of Orissa there is a male or female shaman, called the *kālasi*, who was engaged in times past as a diviner at the outbreaks of smallpox or cholera for interpreting the otherwise inscrutable will of the Ṭhākurāṇī, the *grāma-devatā*, or some other local form of the great Goddess in order that the villagers could know how to put a stop to such natural calamities through the forms of worship required by the circumstances.

The term *kālasi* derives from *kalaśa*, the sacred pot representing the Devī on the occasion of various Śākta rites and ceremonies. A pot is also used by the Saora shamans and shamanins when they fall in trance on the occasion of their divinatory performances. Moreover, pots are dedicated by the Saoras at most of the ceremonies aimed at averting some disease.[126] Such modalities of use of the sacred pot among this Orissan tribe well explain the use of the term *kālasi* to designate those shamans and shamanins of rural Orissa who since time immemorial have put the Saora science of divination at the service of the great Goddess of the Hindus.

On the other hand, the *kālasi* is the traditional medium between gods and men also among the Hinduised Saoras settled in the Orissan plains.

> He is possessed with the spirit of the idols. He often utters many a grave warning to the villagers and tells them the ways and means to propitiate the idols when they happen to be angry with them. The *kālasi* is an intermediary or connecting link between the idols and the common ignorant villagers, and is held in great awe by the latter. When the spirit of the idols is on him, he struts and bounces and makes all sorts of violent gestures. He is often carried on men's arms from the temple to an open space adjoining, the moment the inspiration makes itself visible. There he indulges in violent contortions like a demoniac and gives out what he has to say slowly with an accompaniment of violent gesticulations, which go right into the heart of his expectant audience.[127]

Nowadays, owing to the almost total disappearance of the risk of epidemics in the State, these shamanistic figures have partly lost their importance among the Hindu villagers, even though they are still regarded as the mediums through which the Goddess communicates her wishes to the people. When they are engaged by some devotee, *kālasis* usually fall in trance and thereafter predict evil to some and good to others, prescribing at the same time the remedies for achieving one's goal, which in most cases consist in offerings to the Goddess and in favours to themselves. They are sometimes presented with a fowl, whose blood they drink after pulling off the head.[128] The latter ritual practice has no doubt a tribal origin.

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[125] R. Biasutti, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 712-13.

[126] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 200 and 202.

[127] S.N. Roy, 'The Savaras of Orissa', *Man in India*, Vol. VII (1927), p. 316.

On most of the ritual occasions requiring their presence, *kālasis* are believed to be ritually possessed by some spirit proceeding from the great Goddess, the same way as tribal shamans are believed by the tribesmen to be ritually possessed by some divine or ancestral spirit. The traditional ritual performance of a *kālasi* includes fast for purification of the body to make it fit for being possessed by the great Goddess, besmearing of the forehead with vermilion (sacred to the Goddess), and unrestrained dancing to the sound of drums. When the Goddess is supposed to inspire them, Hindu *kālasis*, just as their Saora homologues, shake their head and leap frantically round and round, ultimately falling into trance and performing some 'miracles'.[129]

A different kind of shamanistic possession ceremony related to Śāktism takes place at Sonepur in Balangir district, where, on the occasion of the annual *Bali Yātrā* coinciding with the *Daśaharā* festival, a semi-tribal shaman becomes spirit-possessed and dances and cries loud with intoxication, bathing in huge pots full of curd mixed with the blood of sacrificial goats outside the shrine of goddess Sureśvarī (a local manifestation of the dreadful Cāmuṇḍā, an image of whom is installed in the temple sanctum).[130] It is believed that Sureśvarī of Sonepur was anciently propitiated with human sacrifices, for which reason the ceremony in question, pivoted upon the ritual use of blood, could well represent a relic of the local human-sacrifice tradition. Similar shamanistic rituals associated with goddess-worship are performed here and there in western Orissa with the joint participation of tribal communities and Hindu villagers.

DEMONIC POSSESSION

The deep-rooted popular belief according to which attacks of delirium, insanity and madness, especially when the victim is a girl, are caused by the intervention of some malevolent spirit proceeding from the Goddess, seems to be rather diffused in Hindu Orissa. Also in this case, the influence exerted by earlier animistic conceptions, mainly based on the idea that gods and ancestral spirits sometimes behave like furies or demons who can cause great nuisance to the members of a tribe, appears to be very conspicuous. Among the Hill Saoras it is the shaman of the village who attributes the reason for such mysterious and apparently unmotivated attacks and suggests the remedies to be adopted in order to repel them (usually the sacrifice of an animal).[131] Therefore, one may conclude that the aforesaid traditional explanation alleged for attacks of mental sickness with attributing them to some malevolent and incomprehensible intervention of the Devī, which is noticed in Orissa, is traceable to pre-historic shamanistic cultures.

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[128] L.S.S. O'Malley, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

[129] K.B. Das, *A Study of Orissan Folk-Lore*, Santiniketan, 1953, pp. 49-50 and 83.

[130] N. Senapati and N. K. Sahu, eds., *Balangir District Gazetteer,* Cuttack, 1968, p. 114.

The Oriyā folk generally attribute to *yoginīs* — a class of deified ogresses or witches collectively conceived as a manifestation of the Devī — the responsibility for inflicting insanity on the people. To avert their attacks special rites of exorcism are performed as a rule by some particular half-priestly celebrants who can be compared with tribal shamans or witch-doctors. The Tāntric meaning of this important class of deities will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, while it must be pointed out here, that their role as the dispensers of mental disorder seems to be connected with their asserted black-magic power. *Yoginīs* were originally a particularly dangerous class of *yakṣīs* who, because of their supposed malevolence toward man, were considered the most direct responsibles for demonic-possession phenomena.[132] Most of *yakṣīs*, meant as semi-divine beings associated with fertility and trees, were, on the contrary, only occasionally considered so.

Some other manifestations of the Goddess are believed by the Oriyā Śāktas to have the power to possess young girls till they are exhausted to death. This is the case, for instance, with goddess Bhairavī of Purunakatak (Phulbani district), who is still today held responsible for many cases of unripe or mysterious death occurred to girls living in that area of Orissa.

ORDEALS

Some peculiar self-injuring rituals, observed by a special class of low-caste penitents called *pāṭuās* or *bhaktas* on the occasion of the allied Śiva-Śakti festivals celebrated in Orissa during the month of Caitra (March-April), might derive from some analogous rituals performed since time immemorial by the tribal shamans of eastern India. The acts of penance being performed by these devotees while they are supposed to be 'possessed' or 'sustained' by the spirit of Śiva or by that of the Devī include walking on live charcoals, swinging on seats covered with thorns or nails, piercing spikes or iron hooks through one's own skin, standing on edged swords, etc. Identical acts of self-torture are, rather significantly, frequently performed by the shamans of some eastern Indian tribes too (the Hill Saoras, Gonds, Bondos, Gadabas, etc.) to authenticate their state of spirit-possession.[133] These ordeals, some of which are also performed in South India during village-goddess festivals, cannot have been adopted by the tribals from the Hindus, as the Orissan scholar D.N. Patnaik seems to believe;[134] on the contrary, the Oriyā low-caste Hindus might have gradually adopted them from their tribal neighbours, whose shamanistic religions were certainly more ancient than Hinduism itself. As it will be discussed in the last chapter of this work, the success of Tāntric doctrines in the medieval period favoured the incorporation of many indigenous rites of ordeal into Hinduism giving them a new religious purport and new significance, more related to the Brāhmaṇical concept of self-sacrifice.

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[131] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-9.

[132] C.L. Fabri, *History of the Art of Orissa*, Bombay (etc.), 1974, p. 200; R. M. Cimino, *art. cit.*, pp. 42-3.

[133] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

DREAMS INSPIRED BY THE GODDESS

According to the age-old principles of the Saora shamanistic religion, the wishes of gods, tutelary spirits and dead ancestors can be communicated to the living not only through the medium of shamans, but also, more directly, by dreams.[135] Most of animistic religions attach great importance to religious-pattern dreams, which can be regarded as unsought mystic visions induced by supernatural presences. Many a tribal culture in the world has institutionalised, in the course of its history, half-priestly figures appointed in dreams of special religious significance.[136]

Religious-pattern dreams also appear to be an important feature in the Hindu tradition in Orissa, particularly in so far as the dreams inspired by the Devī (or by Śrī Jagannātha) to priests or kings are concerned. According to the Śākta tradition, it is particularly in dream-life that the Goddess makes her will manifest to those who are qualified to understand her oneiric manifestations. Many instances of this special kind of dreaming activity can be collected in Orissa, some of them pertaining to Śakti cult its present forms and some other being included in old legends. The most relevant among them are given here in succession.

On the occasion of the periodical renewal of the wooden images representing the Jagannātha Trinity of Puri (*Nava-kalevara* festival), a caste of priests, the Daitas, who claim themselves to be the direct descendants of the original tribal worshippers of Nīlamādhava (i.e., of Lord Jagannātha), receive in dream from goddess Maṅgalā of Kakatpur (in whose temple they use to go and sleep for the occasion) the indication of the exact spots where the sacred *nīm* trees that must be used for carving out the new images of the deities are to be found.[137] Goddess Hiṅgulā of Gopalprasad (Dhenkanal district), worshipped in the month of Caitra in the form of flames originating from jets of natural gas issuing from the local subsoil, rich in coal, uses to appear in dream to her chief priest, the *sevait*, some days before the beginning of the great festival to her dedicated, and indicates him the exact spot of her annual manifestation.[138] A legend associated with the cult of goddess Sāralā (Sanskrit Śāradā) of Jhankad in Cuttack district narrates that the cult image of that goddess was carved by Paraśurāma, the priestly *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, out of a stone slab extracted from the subsoil, and that the exact spot where to find the slab was suggested to that mythical hero by the goddess while the former was immersed in a deep yogic sleep under a banyan tree. In the legends relating to the origins of their respective shrines, the goddesses Tārā-Tāriṇī (installed on a hill in Ganjam district), Maṇināga of Ranpur (Puri district) and Tāriṇī of Ghatgaon (Keonjhar district) are reported to have told in dream to their respective royal worshippers or priests where to establish their shrines.[139]

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[134] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

[135] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. LIII.

[136] J.S. Lincoln, *The Dream in Primitive Cultures*, London, 1935, p. 22.

[137] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-5.

In all the four mentioned examples a goddess gives orders or suggestions to a royal or priestly devotee of hers while the latter is dreaming. Such a kind of 'oneiric' relation temporarily established between the great Goddess and an important Hindu devotee recalls the analogous relation that is established in dream between the half-priestly member of a tribal community having a shamanistic religion and his deities or ancestral spirits. It may, therefore, be concluded here that the legends and rituals of Orissa pivoted upon the idea of the Devī's speaking in dream to this or that of her devotees appear to sink their own roots in tribal traditions of the shamanistic type, and particularly in the Saora ones, which have been referred to above.

Worship of pillar-goddesses and pole-goddesses

The incorporation of autochthonous tribal cults into Hinduism is documented in Orissa starting from the Gupta period. Through a Sanskritisation process, many tribal deities entered since then on the realm of Hindu religion. The non-Āryan cults of Orissa which have been Sanskritised are mostly related to a female deity, who protects the people, increases the fertility and accepts blood sacrifice (which, in times past, could even consist in the offering of a human victim). The predominance of such Āryanised autochthonous goddesses in popular Hinduism is a significant feature of the regional tradition of Orissa.

It is worth noticing that the earliest epigraphical evidence documenting the achieved Āryanisation of an autochthonous cult in ancient Kaliṅga is referred to a female deity, Stambheśvarī (the Lady-of-the-Pillar), still today venerated in the hill tracts of western, southern and central Orissa in her own original form, represented by a wooden post or a stone pillar. The worshippers of this goddess include both Hindu farmers and Kondh and

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[138] N. Senapati and P.N. Tripathy, eds., *Dhenkanal District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1972, p. 430.

[139] H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, pp. 96-7, 104 and 116.

Gond communities,[140] which circumstance testifies to the probable tribal origin of the cult. Moreover, some of the ex-warrior castes of the Orissan hinterlands worship Stambheśvarī with Tāntric rites as their own tutelary deity.[141] The latter fact may be related to an early settlement of Āryan communities, including a large number of kṣatriyas, in those regions, where the warrior castes came into touch with the pre-existing non-Āryan cultures.

The earliest reference to a deity termed as Stambheśvarī is found in the copper-plate grants of king Tuṣṭikāra, who in the fifth century AD ruled over the forest-clad regions of Kalahandi, Sonepur, Baudh and Ghumsar.[142] This area coincides, to some extent, with the one formerly covered by the tribal kingdom of Mahākantāra, which is believed to have been brought into the cultural orbit of the Gupta empire after the southern campaigns undertaken by the emperor Samudragupta in the second half of the fourth century AD.[143]

The settlement of the Āryan invaders amidst the non-Āryan tribes then living in those regions involved the former's gradual adoption of the most popular idols and godlings worshipped by the latter. Through the patronage of the cults devoted to the dominant local deities the local kṣatriya chiefs secured the loyalty and collaboration of the tribes and were consequently enabled to consolidate their own military power and to extend peasant agriculture. The brāhmaṇa too, who from the Gupta period onwards were granted lands in those regions of inland Orissa and settled permanently in the priestly villages called *śāsanas*, came into touch with the forest tribes. They strived to codify the latter's duties to the new Āryan dominant castes, to improve their primitive methods of cultivation and to give their divinities a place in the Hindu pantheon. The coexistence of Brāhmaṇical and tribal cultures in Orissa led to an interaction between the two and to a mutual adaptation of the respective religions.[144]

Stambheśvarī, in her role as the tutelary deity of the dynasty of Tuṣṭikāra, is the best example of an autochthonous goddess of Orissa who, through a process of Āryanisation that took place during the Gupta age, was ultimately accepted by the Hindus as a manifestation of Śakti. The famous shrine of Khambheśvarī (the Oriyā Prākṛtic form for Stambheśvarī) located at Aska in Ganjam district was, most likely, established by Tuṣṭikāra himself in about the fifth century AD.[145] There, as well as at the other important Khambheśvarī shrine in the State, located at Sonepur in the far northern district of Balangir, the goddess is worshipped in the form of a stone pillar which has been anthropomorphised by the addition of three eyes and a protruding tongue. This class of idols — clothed in garments, as it is the rule for any image of a Hindu goddess presiding over a sanctuary of her own — remind, in their general appearance, of the Kālī images, wrapped in drapery, which can be seen within the sanctum of many Kālī temples throughout India. This notwithstanding, as D.C. Sircar has pointed out, it is not exact to say that Stambheśvarī is virtually identical to Kālī.[146] The former deity, in fact, has a separate history from that of the latter, with whom she was identified by the Śāktas in a later period.[147] The same argument also holds good as far as other goddesses of Orissa, worshipped in aniconic form and generally identified with Kālī, are concerned, as it is the case, for instance, with Samalei of Sambalpur and Bhagavatī of Banpur.

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[140] N.K. Sahu, 'Orissa from the Earliest Times to the Present Day', in Id., ed., *A History of Orissa,* pp. 352-3.

[141] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Boudh-Khondmals District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1983, p. 63.

[142] A.K. Rath, *Studies on Some Aspects of the History and Culture of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1987, p. 82.

[143] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

[144] A.K. Rath, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-1.

[145] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Goddess Stambheśvarī is believed to have been originally represented by a simple pole made of wood. This is enough clearly suggested by the practice, still today followed by the villagers in some rural areas of Orissa, of installing in every ten years a new wooden post as the representative icon of Stambheśvarī, regarded in this case as the *grāma-devatā* or village goddess.[148] The following of a similar tradition, based on wood-working, on the occasion of the periodical renewal of the representative idols of the Jagannātha Trinity at Puri (*Nava-kalevara*), is worth noticing. Both these practices of manufacture are esteemed to be very old, for the simple reason that they must have originated at a time when wood was the chief material being employed in India for carving out the images of the deities. The earliest stages of civilization in India were marked, in all evidence, by material cultures mainly depending on the use of wood in art and architecture. This is the reason why so few remains dating from the proto-historic epoch have come to light in the country so far. Consequently, there can be little doubt about the pole-goddess cult having antedated by far the earliest penetration of the Āryans into Orissa. This cult, indeed, is evidently to be related to an archaic culture depending on the use of wood in all walks of life.

With this at the background, many a hypothesis can be advanced as to the religious meaning of the worship of pillar-goddesses and pole-goddesses in ancient Kaliṅga. A summary of such hypotheses is given below.

PHALLIC WORSHIP

D.C. Sircar thinks that Stambheśvarī was represented in the form of a pillar inasmuch as the latter cult object was indicating the union of Śiva and Śakti.[149] According to such a view, the representative icon of the goddess would have been originally made out on a *stambha* (pillar) indicating a Śiva-*liṅga*. The god Śiva, indeed, is said in the Purāṇas to have once assumed the form of a *stambha* to test Brahmā and Viṣṇu (myth of the endless *liṅga*).

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[146] D.C. Sircar, ed., *The Śakti Cult and Tārā*, p. 8.

[147] K.C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

[148] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

The antiquity of the *liṅga* as the sign of the male deity, of whom it symbolises the phallus, appears lost in the mists of time. Traces of pre-historic phallic worship have been found in profusion from the British Isles to South-East Asia, passing across the Mediterranean basin and the Indian sub-continent. It is impossible now to go into the complex question regarding the origins of phallic worship, but adequate here to say, that the phallus is included by a section of scholars among the cult objects peculiar to the ancient Austro-Asiatic cultures of India (from which also the cult of Stambheśvarī appears to have originated).[150] The *liṅga* as a symbol of the *axis mundi* was not 'created' all at once by the Āryans!

It must be also recalled here that among many primitive tribes of Middle India the upright monoliths erected in honour of the dead ancestors, resembling somehow the shape of a *liṅga*, seem to have been originally associated with the worship of an earth-goddess, i.e., of Mother Earth, who, starting at least from the Neolithic age, was conceived as the divine guardian of the spirits of the dead.[151] Therefore, one cannot simply state that the worship of upright monoliths (including among them uncarved stone pillars) is exclusively to be related to phallic cults. The archaic megalithic cults of the tribal peoples of Middle India, connected with Mother Earth cultus, should be also taken in consideration in this respect.

In conclusion, even admitting that pillar-worship may have been, at a certain stage of Orissan religious history, indicative of the union of the male and the female principle (Śiva and Śakti), as opined by D.C. Sircar, the roots of such an androgynous symbolism are, none the less, to be traced to the Neolithic culture complex of eastern India.

ILL-GIVING DEITIES REPRESENTED IN PILLAR FORM

Related to the former is the male-female symbolism underlying the cult icons of some ill-giving deities worshipped by the tribals of Orissa. Just to give an instance of this, the shrines erected by the Hill Saoras for the god of smallpox Lurnisum and his wife — but the two actually form one androgynous entity — contain pairs of small stone pillars regarded as the presiding deities of the shrine itself.[152] According to V. Elwin, the phallic symbol for the female deity of smallpox suggests that the wife is a later accretion, perhaps due to the Hindu influence. A rough phallic-like stone is also the symbol of the Ṭhākurāṇī — i.e., the Āryanised goddess of smallpox — among some semi-Hinduised Saora communities of Orissa.[153] Also the Juangs, another important tribe of Orissa, worship their village goddesses in the form of upright stones, which are sometimes replaced by a pair of pillars representing respectively the supreme male and female divinity.[154]

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[149] *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXVIII, No. 2, pp. 107-14.

[150] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[151] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 365-6.

[152] *Ibid.*, pp. 176 and 287.

It cannot be excluded that the concept about Stambheśvarī has partly evolved from the aforesaid classes of pillar-goddesses, worshipped by some Orissan tribes both as the giver of various diseases and the protectresses of the village. An androgynous origin of the deities in question is highly probable also in this case, as it is possibly indicated by the fact, that they are often associated with a male counterpart in the overall form consisting of two-paired stone pillars.

POLE-DEITIES

Another possible evidence of the fact that the archetypal form of Stambheśvarī was once regularly paired with a consort deity — in this case, in the overall form of two-paired wooden poles — is provided by the cult images enshrined in the sanctum of Jagannātha temple at Puri. In fact, the image of goddess Subhadrā, which is part of the Jagannātha Trinity, is represented by a shapeless and armless idol carved out of a log of wood in such a way, that it clearly suggests some relation with the tribal pillar-deities of Orissa. Even more does so Sudarśana, a deified form of the *cakra* of Viṣṇu-Jagannātha represented in the shape of a plain wooden post. Since the two deities are taken out in procession in the same car on the occasion of the annual Puri car festival, H. Kulke has put forward the hypothesis that they were originally much more closely connected, possibly representing one deity in the form of two wooden posts.[155]

Evidence of early worship of a non-Āryan male deity represented in the form of a wooden pole is also furnished by the cult of Murugan, once much widespread in the Tamil country. This young god, later on identified by the Hindus with the son of Śiva (variously named as Skanda, Kumāra, Kārttikeya or Subrahmaṇya), was associated with snakes, animal sacrifices and liquors like Śiva himself and some forms of the Devī. In times past, the cult of Murugan, popular not only among the Dravidians, but also among some Austro-Asiatic tribes, went possibly so far along the Eastern Ghats as to touch southern Orissa, which is the cradle of the pillar-goddess cult.[156] Some hill tribes of Orissa still perform the worship of Stambheśvarī with offerings of meat and wine, which fact finds some parallel either in the South Indian cult of Murugan and in that of the terrible goddess that was reportedly venerated by the ancient Śavaras. On this ground, the possibility of an early establishment of some form of 'marital' relationship between a pillar-god similar in concept to Murugan and a pillar-goddess, later on known as Stambheśvarī, cannot be easily ruled out. The original link uniting Subhadrā and Sudarśana, hypothesised by H. Kulke while discussing the sources of the cult of Jagannātha, may be tentatively related to the same non-Āryan religious tradition.

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[153] *Ibid.*, pp. 289-90.

[154] S.K. Mahapatra and N.N. Patnaik, *Patterns of Tribal Housing*, Bhubaneswar, 1986, p. 18.

[155] H. Kulke quoted in T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, Leiden (etc.), 1987, pp. 1135-6.

[156] K.C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

WOODEN POLES ERECTED IN CONNECTION WITH ANCESTOR-WORSHIP

Again with reference to the worship of wooden posts in tribal cultures, it must be pointed out here that the Gonds of Bastar, the Khasis and Nāgas of Assam and some primitive tribes of Indonesia, Burma and Oceania still today use to erect Y-shaped poles on the occasion of their ceremonies for the propitiation of the forefathers. Such poles, whose Y-shape, resembling a pair of bovine horns, originated most likely from their being erected on the occasion of the sacrificial offering of buffaloes or cows to the ancestors, are regarded as the substitutes for the menhirs characterising most of the pre-historic megalithic traditions of eastern India.[157] One may even venture, in this connection, the hypothesis of some relation with the ancient Indus Valley religion, as it is well known that a pole surmounted by a pair of bovine horns is depicted on a famous seal unearthed there (the one representing a tauromachy scene). The pre-Vedic motif of the horned pole seems to be also related to tree-worship, and therefore, to Yakṣa cult. The latter hypothesis is supported by another seal recovered from the Indus Valley, which depicts a goddess (?) standing on a tree with bifurcate foliage, resembling the motif of the horned pole. In such a perspective, pillar-worship may be even regarded as a more developed and contracted form of tree-worship.

But what is most remarkable here is, that both the forms under which goddess Stambheśvarī was historically worshipped in Orissa, namely, the stone pillar and the wooden post, appear to be related to the Neolithic culture complex of eastern India. The links between these specific aniconic forms of the Devī and the supposed Neolithic worship of Mother Earth (associated with ancestor-worship) appear more clear when one thinks that the sacrifice of the buffalo — still performed by some Orissan tribes on the occasion of memorial ceremonies celebrated in honour of the dead relatives before sacred poles and monoliths — became, in course of time, the most sacred offering to the Supreme Goddess of the Hindus, one of the most ancient manifestations of whom is represented, in Orissa, just by Stambheśvarī.

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[157] M. Wheeler, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-8.

THE YŪPA

To conclude this review of the possible non-Āryan archetypes of goddess Stambheśvarī or Khambheśvarī, the physical resemblance of the latter's cult icon with the Vedic sacrificial post (*yūpa*) must be taken into consideration.

The *yūpa*, originally a wooden pole erected to tie and immolate animals, was regarded by the Vedic Āryans as 'the crestlock of the sacrifice personified'.[158] This most sacred cult object, whose direct ancestor might be the horned pole depicted on the above-mentioned seal recovered from the Indus Valley, was conceived in Vedic times as an earthly form of the great cosmic tree, the axis of the universe uniting the earth and the sky, in that it was taken as a symbol of the primordial self-sacrifice through which the *puruṣa* was believed to have manifested the entire universe.

According to the Veda, not only sacrifice created the world, but it also always upholds it in the form of a *yūpa*.[159] The universe, in such a religious perspective, is sustained by perpetual sacrifice in imitation of the self-sacrifice performed by the *puruṣa* in the beginning of time. In Vedic times, at the time of sacrifice, the place where the sacrificial *yūpa* stood was regarded as the navel of the universe; after its consecration, the *yūpa* itself was included among the *āprī* divinities, i.e., the deified objects used during the sacrifice.[160] The virtual deification of the *yūpa*, known since the Vedic period, is interestingly noticed at the temples of Khambheśvarī situated respectively at Aska and Sonepur in Orissa. At both those places, indeed, the goddess, besides being worshipped as a stone pillar within the sanctum of the shrine, is also worshipped as a wooden *yūpa* facing the main door of the same. (*fig*. 64)

Nevertheless, in later Vedic Hinduism the *yūpa* is said to belong to Viṣṇu, the personification of sacrifice as well as the preserver of the entire creation;[161] so why did a female deity like Stambheśvarī start, at a certain time, to be regarded by the Āryan rulers of Orissa as the personification of the sacrificial post?

Once again, the answer is to be found in the autochthonous female-oriented cults anciently prevailing in that part of India, which often involved bloody sacrifices. The Kondhs, for instance, represent since time immemorial their earth-goddess, Tari or Dharni Penu, as a wooden sacrificial pole, to which human victims, now replaced by buffaloes, were once tied up for being immolated on the occasion of the notorious *Meriah* sacrifice.[162] Some other

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[158] P. Banerjee, *Early Indian Religions*, Delhi (etc.), 1973, pp. 132-3.

[159] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *Śilpa Prakāśa: Medieval Orissan Sanskrit Text on Temple Architecture by Rāmacandra Kaulācāra*, Leiden, 1966, p. XLII.

[160] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 511.

[161] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. Veda e antico Induismo*, p. 204.

[162] V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, pp. 545 ff.

Orissan tribes, as already mentioned, used to sacrifice buffaloes to their forefathers at the foot of wooden poles, possibly in connection with the worship of Mother Earth. Buffaloes are still today offered in Phulbani district as a sacrifice to Baralā Devī, a variant form of Stambheśvarī represented, on that ritual occasion, by a pole which is fixed on the ground on the day preceding the sacrifice day.[163] Some gruesome legends, respectively associated with the shrine of goddess Khambheśvarī at Aska in the district of Ganjam and with that of goddess Birukhomb (another variant form of Stambheśvarī[164]) at Kendupada in the district of Koraput, are suggestive of the fact that human sacrifices were once performed at those two places.[165]

It seems, therefore, probable that the Āryans, while settling in the hilly regions of inland Orissa, identified the blood-thirsty goddesses worshipped by the tribals in the form of a wooden pole or of an upright stone with the *yūpa*, an already semi-deified Brāhmaṇical cult object, to which animals, including buffaloes, were tied up in Vedic times to be immolated in honour of various gods. The subsequent penetration of tribal elements into the fold of Brāhmaṇical religion in Orissa may have brought about the full development of the Vedic concept about the divine nature of the *yūpa*, with this process ultimately resulting in a cultic identification of the latter with the indigenous goddesses of Orissa who most resembled it in their shape and function. Consequently, the female deities worshipped by the tribals in the form of a post or a pillar started being regarded by the Āryans as the personifications of the deified *yūpa*, and as such they were soon absorbed into the newly-established Sanskritised cult of Stambheśvarī.

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[163] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Boudh-Khondmals District Gazetteer*, p. 88.

[164] N. Senapati and N.K. Sahu, eds., *Koraput District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1966, pp. 417-8.

[165] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-9 and 93-4.

2

Śakti Cult in Orissa in the Historical Period

FROM the time of the Guptas the influence of Śāktism became conspicuous in the whole of the Indian sub-continent. Most of the Purāṇic works composed during that period greatly enhance the position of the female deities even subordinating the great male gods to them. Śakti emerged in various manifestations while the popular cults of the female principle became progressively the driving force of the society. The goddess-cults received converts from all sections of communities of all creed, including Buddhism, Jainism, Vaiṣṇavism and, of course, Śaivism, which had flourished since the hoary past side by side with Śāktism. The mass strength behind the worship of the female principle caused goddesses to be placed by the side of gods of all religions while Śāktism gradually developed as an independent religion.

By the fifth-sixth centuries AD Śakti cult had gained the greatest prominence also in Orissa. The *pīṭhas* meant to enshrine Brāhmaṇical goddesses started to be gradually established in the coastal provinces of the country. They had not only the support of Tāntric initiates to go ahead with their spiritual pursuits, but also caused the people in general to appreciate the Tāntric practices. The magico-esoteric rituals characterising the Tāntric mode of worship became widespread in Orissa at least from the eighth century AD, if not earlier. The Śākta-Tāntric centres, in Orissa as elsewhere in India, created a suitable atmosphere for *sādhana* (the overall religious practice), which assumed a heterodox character and embraced people from all castes and creed.

The period of Orissan history running from the seventh to the thirteenth century AD was a flourishing period of Śaivism and Śāktism alike, when most of the Śākta *pīṭhas* presently found in the State sprang up, Tāntric shrines of the Śaiva and Śākta affiliation as well as Tāntric Buddhist monasteries were built under the patronage of royal dynasties, awe-inspiring Tāntric images signifying numerous manifestations of the godhead were carved out, Tāntric texts composed, Tāntric ritualistic patterns and religious festivals established. Particularly during the period of reign of the Bhauma-kara dynasty (*ca.* AD 736-945) Tantrism became the dominant religious trend in Orissa and continued to influence Śaivism, Śāktism, Buddhism and even Jainism till the later medieval period, even though the Gaṅga and Sūryavaṁśī monarchs, who ruled over the Kaliṅgan empire starting from the twelfth century AD, did not favour the Śākta-Tāntric practices in their dominions. After the illustrious Somavaṁśī kings, the successors of the Bhauma-karas, had restored Śaivism to its pristine Āgamic form and made it their State religion, the Imperial Gaṅgas promoted the national cult of Jagannātha and, fostering a syncretistic religious policy, amalgamated into it both Śaiva and Śākta trends. In the Sūryavaṁśī epoch the Vaiṣṇavite *bhakti* triumphed all over Orissa with some significant Śākta influences upon its underlying religious concepts (for instance, the introduction of the singing and dancing of the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva, a very sensualistic literary work dealing with Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā's love affair, in the ritualistic pattern observed at the great Jagannātha temple of Puri). The preaching of the Vaiṣṇava saint Caitanya amidst popular chanting of religious songs in regional language further accelerated the flow of Vaiṣṇavism as a mass religion.

All the above-noted religious movements continued down to the present period in Orissa with more emphasis, respectively, on the cult of Jagannātha and the allied Śaiva-Śākta faiths. My attempt in this chapter is to trace the religious development in Orissa in the historical epoch, of course with special regard to Śakti cult and its links with other faiths.

Rise of Śakti cult in the Gupta age

A process of Sanskritisation analogous to the one that, during the Gupta age, led to the admission into the Hindu pantheon of Orissa of an entire class of tribal goddesses collectively worshipped under the name of Stambheśvarī (see chapter 1) began at a still earlier date in the ancient town of Virajā, situated on the lower course of the river Vaitarani. Virajā or Virañja-nagara, presently represented by the modern city of Jajpur in Cuttack district, is possibly the oldest seat of Śakti cult allied with Tantrism having been established in ancient Kaliṅga; its history, in fact, goes back to the days of the *Mahābhārata*, when the city was already considered an important place of pilgrimage sanctified by the presence of the shrine of the goddess bearing the same name. Later on, some Purāṇic myths, whose respective original nuclei probably date back to the Gupta period, highlighted the shrine of goddess Virajā by associating it to the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava faiths.

The present section deals with the earlier phases of the cult of Virajā at Jajpur without taking into consideration its subsequent Śākta-Tāntric developments, which took place starting from the Bhauma-kara period (*ca.* AD 736-945). Such a kind of approach to the subject will allow the reader to better estimate the importance of the contributions given by the non-Āryan forms of cult, prevailing in proto-historic Orissa, to the establishment of the earliest great centre of Devī-worship in the State.

ANTIQUITY OF THE SHRINE OF VIRAJĀ

The earliest mention of Virajā *kṣetra* in Brāhmaṇical literature is found in the *Vana-parvan* section of the *Mahābhārata* (III.85.6). This ancient record, which certifies the existence of the shrine of Virajā on the river Vaitarani in the first centuries of the Christian era, is placed in the great epic immediately after the enumeration of other holy rivers of eastern India, such as the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. This is perhaps suggestive of the fact, that the sacred *tīrtha* named after goddess Virajā attracted since those days the Brāhmaṇical Hindu pilgrims coming from North India as an end-of-pilgrimage place.[1] Despite this, some later Vedic texts, particularly some passages from the *Manu-smṛti*, indicate that the territory of the Kaliṅgas was regarded by the ancient Āryans as an impure country, whose inhabitants, in this made equal by the texts in question to the neighbouring Aṅgas of Bengal, had forsook the pure religious rites.[2]

Actually, in proto-historic times the coastal regions extending from the Ganges to the Godavari appear to have served as a culture bridge between the Āryan and the Dravidian areas of civilisation, as well as to have represented a privileged place for the assimilation of the religious beliefs of the primitive tribes, settled in the adjacent hill tracts, into the fold of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism.[3] Thus, the geographic position of Orissa, inasmuch as the latter region represented a cultural and ethnical borderland, encouraged the achievement of a religious synthesis between Vedic and pre-Vedic cults. The alleged impurity of the inhabitants of ancient Kaliṅga as recorded in the laws of Manu may, thus, hint at the unorthodox rites and beliefs that were inevitably destined to originate out of such a process of religio-cultural transformation.

The shrine of goddess Virajā, located in the very heart of a region in course of Āryanisation, such as Orissa was in the time of the *Mahābhārata*'s composition, could have been an end-of-pilgrimage place where the tenets of the Brāhmaṇical religion, introduced there from North India, were constantly in touch with some deeply rooted non-Āryan cults, particularly with the female-oriented ones. The name Virajā itself, which can be translated at will as 'Free-from-Dust', 'Clean', 'Pure' or 'Free-from-Ignorance',[4] is possibly related to the establishment of a Brāhmaṇical religious centre in a land that the Āryans considered 'impure' and that, accordingly, needed to be 'purified' through the superimposition of a goddess from the Sanskrit pantheon over the innumerable local tribal goddesses.

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1. R.P. Chanda, 'Exploration in Orissa', *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No. 44 (1930), p. 1; K.S. Behera, 'The Evolution of Śakti Cult at Jajpur, Bhubaneswar and Puri', in D. C. Sircar, ed., *The Śakti Cult and Tārā*, Calcutta, 1967, p. 75, n. 7.
2. W.W. Hunter, 'Orissa under Indian Rule', in N.K. Sahu, ed., *A History of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1956, p. 53.
3. M. N. Das, 'The Culture of Orissa: A Brief Background', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, Cuttack, 1993, pp. 1-2.
4. M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, new edn., Oxford, 1988, p. 982; W.W. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

According to the Orissan scholar E. Padhi goddess Virajā of Jajpur might have been originally worshipped in pillar form like the aboriginal goddess Stambheśvarī. Pillar-worship, as stated in the preceding chapter, was very popular in Orissa before the deities in anthropomorphic form were regularly introduced in the local sculptural art during the Gupta age. A possible evidence of Virajā's having been anciently worshipped in the shape of a pillar or post — perhaps, for some time, even after the Āryanisation of her shrine had been achieved — is constituted, in the view of the said scholar, by the staff studded with silver and jewels that serves still today as the representative image of the goddess during her annual car festival, held on the occasion of *Durgā-Pūjā*.[5] Moreover, the car festival of Virajā appears to keep the reminiscence of a Buddhist tradition,[6] as it seems to be the case with the Hindu car festivals celebrated at Puri and at Bhubaneswar respectively.

K.C. Panigrahi states that, in the pre-Gupta period, the Śākta shrine of Virajā was dominated for some time by Mahāyāna Buddhism. Though the period in question is the darkest one in Orissan history, it appears quite probable that, before the rise of the Imperial Guptas, Orissa was for some centuries under the supremacy of foreign rulers who patronised Buddhism, with their respective headquarters located at first in the Āndhra country (the Sātavāhanas or some royal dynasty subordinated to them) and in a subsequent period in Magadha (the Muruṇḍas, an allied tribe of the Imperial Kuṣāṇas). In those obscure days, goddess Virajā, whether represented in pillar form or not, may have played an important role even in the Mahāyāna Buddhist pantheon of Orissa, which grew parallel to the Brāhmaṇical one with the probable patronage of the then Buddhist rulers of Kalinga. Among the latter, the dynasty founded by king Guhaśiva, mentioned in the Buddhist annals of Ceylon (the *Dāthavaṁśa*), also seems to have kept for some time the shrine of Virajā under the preponderant influence of Buddhism.[7]

Finally, if ones believes the *Kālikā Purāṇa* (64.43-44), the shrine of Virajā was the first Tāntric (i.e., Śākta) *pīṭha* having been established in the whole of India. In fact, that Śākta Upapurāṇa, compiled during the medieval period, states that the first among such seats of Tāntric worship originated and flourished in Oḍradeśa (Orissa) with Jagannātha as its presiding male deity and Kātyāyanī as its presiding female deity.[8] The *pīṭha* referred to in this text is undoubtedly that of Virajā, who, in the early medieval period, was being worshipped by the Bhauma-kara kings of Orissa under the name of Kātyāyanī.[9] The male deity who is found associated with her in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* is not to be necessarily identified with Lord Jagannātha of Puri: in fact, the name Jagannātha often recurs in the Tantras as one of the many epithets of Bhairava,[10] the aspect of Śiva that is normally associated with the Śākta *pīṭhas*.

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[5] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, p. 7.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] K.C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa* (*Hindu Period*), Cuttack, 1981, pp. 40 and 330.

[8] H.C. Das, *Tāntricism: A Study of the Yoginī Cult*, New Delhi, 1981, p. 5.

[9] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, p. 10.

Though it is obviously impossible to ascertain now whether the shrine of Virajā be really the earliest Śākta *pīṭha* in India or not, the above-mentioned passage from the *Kālikā Purāṇa* may indicate that the orthodox Śāktas of the medieval period attributed the hoariest antiquity to the establishment of some kind of Tāntric worship pattern at that shrine. The proto-Tāntric elements, supposed to have been attached to the cult of Virajā in the pre-Gupta period, could have attracted in those centuries also the Mahāyāna Buddhist worshippers of the supreme Śakti, who was generally named by them as Tārā.

IDENTIFICATION OF VIRAJĀ WITH DURGĀ IN THE GUPTA AGE

The age of the Imperial Guptas (*ca.* AD 300-600) was marked for the great revival of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism all over India. In the new religious scenery, the then rulers of Utkala or Oḍra (the present northern tracts of Orissa), of whom practically nothing is known, felt the necessity of reforming the old Śākta shrine of Virajā by affirming its entirely Brāhmaṇical character.[11] The way they chose to achieve this aim was to identify the presiding goddess of Virajā *kṣetra* with Durgā. The cult of Durgā or Caṇḍī, the furious and warlike virgin goddess residing in the Vindhya mountains, assumed its definitive and classic forms in that period of Indian history, as is shown by the coeval redaction of the *Devī-Māhātmya* or *Saptaśatī Caṇḍī*, a very popular section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* which describes the annihilation of different *asuras* at the hand of Durgā herself or of different subsidiary forms of hers and represents the first appearance of independent Śāktism in Sanskrit literature.

The first step made by the then rulers of Orissa, who must have deeply felt the influence of the Gupta religious milieu, was that of anthropomorphising the cult icon of goddess Virajā, giving it its final shape in the form of two-armed Mahiṣamardinī Durgā. The Gupta age also witnessed the efflorescence of a number of Purāṇic myths relating to the origin of Virajā and of the *kṣetra* by her presided over in Orissa, which were apparently conceived in order to reaffirm the Brāhmanical suzerainty over the shrine and to depurate it from the earlier Buddhist incrustations. This process of religio-cultural transformation must be historically framed into the great conflict that opposed the Buddhists and the Śaivas of Orissa during the Gupta age, which resulted in the emergence of Pāśupata Śaivism as the dominant faith in the region in the post-Gupta period.[12] Since that time onwards, Mahāyāna Buddhism continued to flourish in Orissa especially in Tāntric form (Vajrayāna), which, in the subsequent centuries, was increasingly influenced by the Śaiva and Śākta currents of Hinduism till it was completely overwhelmed by the latter faith in around the beginning of the second millennium of the Christian era.

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[10] K.C. Dash, 'A Study on the Origin of Ratha Yātrā in Puruṣottama Ksetra', unpublished paper.

[11] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

The present cult image of Virajā represents a two-armed Mahiṣamardinī with the buffalo-demon depicted in theriomorphic form. With her right hand she holds a spear which pierces the body of the buffalo while she is raising him up from behind by holding his tail with her left hand. She tramples on the buffalo's neck with her right leg. The traditional mount of Durgā, i.e., the lion, is not present as R.P. Chanda believed.[13] The iconographic features of this cult image, including the absence of lion, conform to the Gupta images of Mahiṣamardinī found in northern and central India, which generally represent the goddess' mode of attacking the demon as described in the *Devī-Māhātmya* (3.37).[14] However, the sculptural representation of the Goddess uplifting the buffalo by his hindquarters is neither attested in the *Devī-Māhātmya* nor in any other ancient text,[15] with this suggesting that the cult image of Virajā may date from an even earlier period than that of the composition of the *Devī-Māhātmya* itself, or at least, that it may have been inspired by a different tradition. Due to its evident affinities with the Gupta specimens of the same iconographic type, the cult image of Virajā at Jajpur is considered by most of scholars to be the oldest image of Mahiṣamardinī having survived in Orissa, possibly along with an image of the same type found at Someśvara temple near Kakatpur in Puri district.[16]

The image of Virajā is enshrined in a comparatively modern temple, located at a different site from the one at which the original temple once stood. This modern fabric may have replaced a far grandeur monument built in the medieval period, when Jajpur, being the capital city of the Bhauma-kara and Somavaṁśī ruling dynasties of Orissa, was a great centre of temple art comparable to Bhubaneswar. At any rate, the remains of a small temple basement located at Kalaspur (a village in the outskirts of Jajpur, included within the ancient limits of Virajā *kṣetra*) are traditionally regarded by the people as the original shrine of the goddess. K.C. Panigrahi assigns these ruins to the early Gupta period, in that they are likely to represent what remains of a flat-roofed temple similar to the Gupta one at Sanchi.[17] Thus, the age of the stone basement at issue is roughly the same of the present worshipped image of Virajā, which, in all probability, was at first enshrined therein to be reinstalled, in course of time, in a larger temple located at a different site. It appears probable that Kalaspur be the site where the shrine of Virajā referred to in the *Mahābhārata* once stood over an earlier shrine dedicated to an indigenous goddess; the latter, as hypothesised by E. Padhi, was possibly worshipped in pillar form.

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[13] R.P. Chanda, *art. cit.*, p. 4; G. C. Patnaik, 'Development of Śāktism at Jajpur', in M. N. Das, ed., *Sidelights on History and Culture of Orissa*, Cuttack, 1977, p. 364.

[14] J.N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd edn., Calcutta, 1956, p. 498.

[15] H. von Stietencron quoted in T.B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and A Study of Its Interpretation*, Albany, 1991, pp. 92-3.

[16] H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXX, Nos. 2, 3 and 4: Glimpses of Orissan Art and Culture, p. 108.

[17] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 370-1.

The stimulating hypothesis of the final emergence of the Mahiṣamardinī image representing goddess Virajā through a process of evolution from pillar-worship to anthropomorphic form cannot be easily ruled out. To support this hypothesis, it may be pointed out that the earliest Mahiṣamardinī images found in South India, dating from the Pallava period (*ca.* AD 325-800),[18] show the goddess as standing in an axial posture over the severed head of the slain buffalo-demon so as to resemble the shape of a column or a mountain. Besides suggesting the aspect of Durgā as the all-powerful goddess of the Mountain, this typically Dravidian iconographic mode may have resulted from an evolution of the concept about a pillar-goddess propitiated with buffalo-sacrifice. Save for some differences in the posture of the goddess and in the depiction of the buffalo, the same seems to hold good in the case of Virajā too. This, however, is only a hypothesis advanced by the present writer.

LINKS OF VIRAJĀ WITH ANCIENT VAIṢṆAVISM

The Purāṇic myths dealing with the origin of Virajā *kṣetra*, which were partly drawn up by the Vaiṣṇavas and partly by the Śaivas, appear, as a whole, to have formed during the Gupta age in order to revive the Brāhmaṇical affiliation of that eminent Śākta sanctuary.

In the Vaiṣṇava tradition initiated with the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (dated to the Gupta age by most of scholars),[19] Virajā *kṣetra* is known as Nābhigayā, namely, the place where the navel of the *asura* Gaya rests.[20] According to the myth, when Viṣṇu killed that gigantic *asura*, whose life had been sanctified by rigorous and continuous ascetic practices, the latter's head remained buried at Gayā in Bihar, the navel at Virajā, and the legs on mount Mahendra in South Orissa (where some among the earliest temples in the State are to be found). At each of those three places, a great Brāhmaṇical *tīrtha* sprang up 'automatically' at the fall of Gaya's limbs. This story appears to be mainly an allegorical representation of the decline of Buddhism in India.[21]

The cities of Gayā and Virajā became very important pilgrimage centres for the Hindus starting from the Gupta age, especially as to the performance of funerary rites (*śrāddha*), and are still today renowned for the offering of *piṇḍas* (cooked rice balls covered with sesame and honey) as an oblation in honour of the dead relatives. The version of the Gayāsura episode contained in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, indeed, narrates that that great anti-god himself, before dying, asked Viṣṇu as a boon that the offering of *piṇḍas* to the *pitṛs*, made at those places where his limbs were to fall, will free the offerer's ancestors from bondage to the earth, will prevent the offerer himself from undergoing any torture in hell, and will cause the salvation of twenty-one generations of his descendants. There is a very sacred pit within the enclosure of the present Virajā temple, called Nābhigayā *kuṇḍa* (cistern), which is said to reach directly the navel of Gayāsura, buried in the bowels of the earth. *Piṇḍas* are traditionally thrown into it by the pilgrims at particular conjunctions as a rite of ancestor-worship. Virajā herself is said to be the foremost energy incarnate in the *Nābhikendra* (Navel of the Universe), which, accordingly, is made coincide with the navel of the *asura* Gaya. Again in this connection, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* states that the portion of Satī's body which fell at Jajpur, thus, originating Virajā *kṣetra* according to the ideology of the Śākta *pīṭhas*, was the navel one, just as in the case of Gayāsura. Such an overlap of symbols related to the Goddess and the *asura* respectively is of the greatest interest in consideration of the absorption of pre-Vedic beliefs into the cult of Virajā.[22]

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[18] T.V. Mahalingam, 'The Cult of Śakti in Tamilnad', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[19] W.D. O'Flaherty, *Miti dell'Induismo*, Parma, 1989, p. 15.

[20] K.S. Behera, *art. cit.*, p. 75.

[21] G.C. Patnaik, *art. cit.*, p. 363.

But, how happened that the Śākta shrine of Virajā started being regarded as a pilgrimage centre sacred to the Vaiṣṇavas?

In the Gupta age the Devī started being associated with Viṣṇu in a number of Hindu myths, as is evinced from the *Harivaṁśa* (myth of Kṛṣṇa's birth), in the *Devī-Māhātmya* (myth of Madhu and Kaiṭabha), and in other sacred texts.[23] Besides this, some Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads state that Kālī is identical to Viṣṇu's mace — that is, the very same weapon by which the god is reported to have slain Gayāsura in the Purāṇic accounts — while the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* describes metaphysically the mace as the Power of Knowledge which inebriates the mind and destroys all that opposes it (that is, as the most spiritually elevated manifestation of the universal Śakti).[24] Moreover, in the earliest sculptural representations of Viṣṇu the mace held by the god is personified by an extremely handsome female deity called Gadādevī.[25]

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[22] D. Shastri, *Origin and Development of the Rituals of Ancestor Worship in India*, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 256 ff.; R. P. Mohapatra, *Temple Legends of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1989, p. 64; P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report, Vol. I: From 1971 to 1974-75*, Bhubaneswar, s.d., p. 21; E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, p. 3; T. Mishra, 'The Sakti Cult and Its Salient Features in Orissa', in K.C. Mishra, T. Mishra and R.K. Mishra, eds., *Studies in Saktism*, Bhubaneswar, 1995, p. 141.

[23] B.C. Raychaudhuri, 'Links between Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 40-1.

[24] A. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, New York, 1964, pp. 156-7.

[25] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *Dizionario dell'Induismo*, Roma, 1980, p. 127; C. Sivaramamurti, *India Ceylon Nepal Tibet*, Torino, 1988, Pt. I, p. 58.

In this context, it must be also noticed that Virajā *kṣetra* is otherwise known as Gadā (mace) *kṣetra*, because it is there that Viṣṇu is believed to have dropped his club.[26] Similarly, Gayā in Bihar is associated with the cult of Gadādhara (the Bearer-of-the-Mace). Since Jajpur was a far-famed Śākta pilgrimage centre already in the pre-Gupta epoch, it appears plausible that the Vaiṣṇava devotees of North India were involved in the pilgrimage activity there, and that, by the Gupta period, the place had become popularised in the Vaiṣṇava mythology as the Seat of the Mace.

To sum up, the identification of the Devī with Viṣṇu's mace, along with the association of the city of Virajā/Jajpur with the mythical episode of Gayāsura, appears to have furnished the Vaiṣṇavas with the fit mythological basis to draw a tie between the ancient *pītha* of Virajā and their own creed. Such an identification may even have derived from some archetypal link between the esoteric symbolism related to Viṣṇu's mace and that related to the staff or pole acting, in some cases, as the representative icon of the great Goddess. Should such hypothesis be ascertained, one would get an important indication supporting the view according to which Virajā was originally worshipped in pillar form at the Orissan *tīrtha* that was subsequently called Gadā *kṣetra* by the Vaiṣṇavas.

LINKS OF VIRAJĀ WITH NĀGA CULT AND WITH ANCESTOR-WORSHIP

Three other sacred texts dating most likely from the Gupta period,[27] namely, the *Matsya* and *Vāyu* Purāṇas and the *Harivaṁśa*, state that Virajā was the mind-born daughter of a class of *pitṛ*s (deified forefathers) as well as the wife of king Nahuṣa.[28]

The story of Nahuṣa is narrated in the *Mahābhārata* more than once. This mythical king had succeeded in obtaining the rank of Indra, but one day he offended the *ṛṣis* (seers) in his pride and was consequently cursed by them to fall from his state and to reappear upon the earth as a serpent.[29] The French scholar S. Lévi pointed out the non-Indo-European, but rather Semitic etymology of the name Nahuṣa, meaning 'a serpent'.[30] Thus, the semi-deified Virajā referred to in this ancient tradition is associated with a consort sharing in, although only in part, the nature of *nāgas*. It must be also noted, in this connection, that goddess Virajā of Jajpur is traditionally worshipped as Maṇināga (the Bejewelled-Cobra), while a cobra with the lower part coiled and the raised hood expanded is carved on her crown along

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26. R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
27. W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
28. V.S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa — A Study*, Varanasi, 1963, p. 108; K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 330.
29. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, tr. and comm. by H.H. Wilson, Calcutta, 1961, p. 331, n. 1.
30. P. Filippani-Ronconi, *Miti e religioni dell'India*, 2nd edn., Roma, 1992, p. 164.

with Gaṇeśa, *liṅga, yoni* and crescent.[31] This may be due to the large prevalence of Nāga cult in Orissa at the time when the present cult image of Virajā was conceived, yet there might be also some connection between the ophidic features of the goddess enshrined in the *pīṭha* of Jajpur and those of the mythical Virajā referred to as the wife of Nahuṣa, a half-serpent king.

The above-said reference to Virajā as the daughter of the *pitṛ*s appears very relevant also in view of the ancient links that, at Jajpur, united Śakti cult and the *śrāddha* rituals, namely, the most ancient form of Brāhmaṇical funerary observances. Some among the earliest Purāṇas state that the *pitṛ*s were actually the first gods, and that they were once venerated by the later gods.[32] This perhaps hints at the fact that, in India, the worship of the forefathers, like that of the aboriginal divinities or spirits whom the Āryans named *asura*s, preceded the spread of the Brāhmaṇical religion.

The *sapiṇḍikaraṇa* ceremony, performed by the Vedic Āryans about one year after one's death to make a *preta* (the departed soul still living on the earth as a ghost) a full-fledged forefather ready to be permanently admitted into the assembly of the *pitṛ*s in the underworld, appears to have been based on the same conception of the thereafter underlying the age-old megalithic rituals of the memorial type still today performed by part of the non-Āryan tribes settled in eastern India. The ceremonies of ancestor-worship observed by those tribesmen, indeed, aim at giving the souls of the forefathers a permanent seat in the underworld by a process of magical 'transfer', which is believed to take place after they have been 'fixed' for some time to the earth through their ceremonial 'imprisonment' into sacred megaliths or poles.[33]

Again in this connection, the list of *śrāddha-tīrtha*s (the holy places at which the Hindus traditionally perform memorial ceremonies in honour of the dead), as given in the *Matsya Purāṇa*, coincides almost exactly with that of the Śākta *pīṭha*s.[34] The latter were considered to be the places of fixation on the soil of the great Goddess in her aspect as Mother Earth, which in most of Neolithic cultures (probably also the Indian ones) was ritually connected with the propitiation of the dead ancestors, the latter being supposed to reside in the earth goddess' subterranean womb.

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[31] B. Mishra, 'Maṇināga Worship in Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. II, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 45; R.K. Mishra, 'Sakti Cult in Orissa — An Iconographic Overview', in K.C. Mishra, T. Mishra and R.K. Mishra, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 152.

[32] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, tr. and comm. by H.H. Wilson, pp. 256-7, n. 1.

[33] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. Veda e antico Induismo*, Milano, 1981, p. 189; V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, London, 1955, p. 358.

[34] V.S. Agrawala, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

Finally, the all-India autumnal rites of ancestor-worship, culminating with the famous Hindu festival known as *Dīpāvalī*, present, particularly in eastern India, some important analogies with the corresponding tribal observances for the propitiation of the dead ancestors, as is shown in chapter 5 of this work. Among the Hindus of Orissa and Bengal, significantly enough, the autumnal ancestor-worship is associated with Kālī, while among the tribal communities inhabiting the same regions this worship pattern is associated with different local goddesses. This may be taken as another evidence of the establishment, from prehistoric times, of a strong mythic link between the female principle and the subterranean abode of the dead.[35]

The above scattered considerations just aim at suggesting a relation between the Hindu mode of propitiation of ancestral spirits and the pre-Āryan cults centred round goddesses personifying the energies of the earth and acting, at the same time, as the supreme guardians of the souls of the dead wandering about the underworld. Goddess Virajā, who is associated with the *pitṛ*s in early Purāṇic records, might well represent the Sanskritised hypostasis of this female-oriented religious complex. The name Virajā itself, which also means 'Free-from-Menstrual-Excretion',[36] is possibly indicative of the fact, that this goddess was not simply identified with the biological cycles of nature (equalised to menstrual cycle), but was, on the contrary, conceived as a metaphysical divinity similar in essence to Kālī. The latter goddess, in her aspect as Nidrā (Sleep), is described in the *Harivaṁśa* as a black womb holding the infernal waters with their population of sleeping spirits;[37] similarly, Virajā of Jajpur, being associated with the oblation rites for the dead ancestors, has been always regarded as the divine queen of the infernal regions, an ultramundane being who transcends the phenomenal world.

It cannot be, therefore, by chance that, in a myth narrated in the *Mahābhārata* (*Droṇa-parvan* Appx., No. 8, lines 71-249), the name Virajā is conferred by Brahmā on the destructive goddess Mṛtyu (Death), created by Brahmā himself to preside over the realm of the dead, and, thus, conceived as the female counterpart of the god Yama. Yet this obscure goddess, who appears to be but a prototype of the later developed figure of Durgā/Kālī, attains from Brahmā, through the performance of hard *tapas*, the boon of freeing her devotees from sin, that is, of conferring *mokṣa*.[38]

The river Vaitarani, bathing Virajā *kṣetra* with its sacred waters, is regarded by the Hindus as the river of the dead. The Sanskrit name of this river (Vaitaraṇī) means 'she who lets one pass thereafter', with reference either to the river of blood and filth separating the earth from the infernal regions, a river that the dead must cross in order to reach the realm of Yama, and to the mythic cow that carries on its back the souls of the dead southwards (south is the direction of death) across the river bearing the same name.[39] The Vaitaraṇī was defined by W.W. Hunter as 'the Styx of the Hindus'.[40] In this connection, an ancient popular belief runs that the Vaitarani of Orissa is a branch of the Ganges emerging from the subsoil after a long subterranean course, along which it flows through the infernal regions.[41] From thence, the river is said to reach Virajā *kṣetra,* where funerary rites in honour of the dead ancestors have been observed from time immemorial in the presence of the great Goddess in Virajā form. The pre-Vedic origin of this worship pattern is possibly indicated by the fact that its mythical establisher, the already mentioned *asura* Gaya, is said in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* to have been honoured by the people as a great saint long before being killed by Viṣṇu.[42]

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[35] R.N. Dash, 'Folk Festivals of Orissa — A Study', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXIII, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 77.

[36] M. Monier-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 982.

[37] W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, pp. 218 ff.

[38] A. Hiltebeitel, 'The Indus Valley "Proto-Śiva" Reexamined through Reflections on the Goddess, the Buffalo, and the Symbolism of vāhanas', *Anthropos*, vol. LXXIII (1978), pp. 783-5.

It appears undeniable that ancestor-worship has a long history of its own in Orissa, beginning from the megalithic ceremonies celebrated since pre-historic times by the Munda-speaking tribes. Tribal ceremonies of propitiation of the forefathers — originally connected, as it seems, with Mother Earth cultus — are still today generally accompanied in India by the sacrifice of buffaloes.[43] In this perspective, the sacrifice of a buffalo, traditionally offered to goddess Virajā on the occasion of the *Durgā-Pūjā* festival, could be also interpreted as a legacy from Neolithic cults pivoted upon the anciently established relation between the deified earth and the spirits of the dead ancestors. On the other hand, the original links of the autumnal *Durgā Pūjā* with forms of spirit-worship in vogue among the non-Āryan tribes of southern and eastern India are well known to scholars.

LINKS OF VIRAJĀ WITH ANCIENT ŚAIVISM

The shrine of Virajā, regarded from ancient times as one of the celebrated *pīṭha*s of the pan-Indian Tāntric tradition, is obviously associated in Hindu mythology with Śiva too. As it will be shown in the next section, the period of great ascendancy of Śaivism in Orissa started in the Gupta epoch. The Śaiva myths dealing with the rise of Virajā *kṣetra* — which, by that time, was already known as a famous place of pilgrimage — cannot be thus of a much later origin than the Gupta epoch itself.

A myth recorded in the *Skanda Purāṇa*[44] narrates that a great Brāhmaṇical sacrifice was once celebrated in the city of Jajpur by Brahmā himself, who performed ten times the horse-sacrifice on the bank of the Vaitarani. At the end of the sacrifice, a Śiva-*liṅga* originated from one of the three sacred fires prescribed in the *śrauta* ritual and came to be known as Īśāneśvara. The deity was accompanied by four Bhairavas to guard the different directions of the *kṣetra*. Soon after the manifestation of this Śiva-*liṅga*, Pārvatī arose from the *gārhapatya-agni* (the householder's fire, having a circular shape and representing the centre of family ritual) and intimated Brahmā to name her Virajā. She was entreated by Brahmā to glorify the *kṣetra* by her presence as the divine consort of Śiva, so that that sacred place was perpetually named after her.[45]

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[39] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, pp. 145 and 463.

[40] W.W. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

[43] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-66.

[44] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

Although the *Skanda Purāṇa* is considered to be a medieval work, the Orissan scholar G.C. Patnaik is of the view that also the Śaiva myth in question, like the Vaiṣṇava myth of Gayāsura, points to the revival of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism that took place at Virajā *kṣetra* during the Gupta age.[46] In the later Vedic period, goddesses like Umā, Durgā and Kālī were connected by the Sanskrit writers with Agni and the sacrificial fire.[47] Woman as such is conceived as the sacrificial fire in many passages of the Upaniṣads.[48] This ancient liturgical and conceptual link, along with the gradual absorption of the figure of Agni into that of Śiva in the post-Vedic period, appears to have played a role in the creation of the Śaiva legend relating to Virajā's birth from the *gārhapatya* fire in the course of the great Vedic sacrifice conducted by the god Brahmā on the bank of the river Vaitarani. Furthermore, the motif of Virajā's birth from the sacred fire resembles that of Durgā's birth from the combined *tejas* of the gods as narrated in the *Devī-Māhātmya*. The circular shape of the *gārhapatya* fire, from which Virajā is said to have been born, recalls some well-known Śākta symbols, such as the womb, the *yoni* and the sacred pot.

Significantly enough, the site at which Brahmā is said to have performed the great sacrifice that gave birth to Virajā, namely, Daśāśvamedha *ghāṭ* on the bank of the Vaitarani,[49] is associated from time immemorial with the yearly *śrāddha* rites for the dead ancestors, having their other centre, as already suggested, at the Nābhigaya *kuṇḍa* in the premises of Virajā temple.[50] Therefore, the spot indicated by this Śaiva tradition as the birthplace of the goddess is involved in the same kind of ancestor-worship pattern that plays a pre-eminent role also in the above-mentioned Vaiṣṇava tradition relating to the origin of Virajā *kṣetra* from

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[45] R.L. Mitra, *The Antiquities of Orissa*, Calcutta, reprint 1961, II, pp. 257-8; R. P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

[46] G.C. Patnaik, *art. cit.*, p. 364.

[47] B.P. Sinha, 'Evolution of Śakti Worship in India', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[48] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, New Delhi, 1974, p. 34.

[49] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[50] P. Acharya, *Studies in Orissan History, Archaeology and Archives*, Cuttack, 1969, p. 358.

Gayāsura's body. Evidently the rituals of ancestor-worship performed in the area of Jajpur antedated both the said traditions, which were probably canonised in the Gupta age (or in a slightly later period) in connection with the process of Sanskritisation of tribal religious practices meant for the propitiation of the dead ancestors, which must have been certainly prevalent till that epoch along the course of the Vaitarani. Among the latter religious practices, the ones associated with the adoration of an earth-goddess might have played so relevant a role in Orissa, that they were soon absorbed into the cult pattern observed at the first important Śākta *pīṭha* established in the region by the followers of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, namely, the shrine of Virajā at Jajpur.

Śakti cult in the post-Gupta period

In the post-Gupta epoch, as the Śākta *pīṭha* of Virajā extended by degrees its religious jurisdiction over large areas of north Orissa covering the modern Cuttack and Baleswar districts,[51] the usage of installing Mahiṣamardinī images for worship was universally adopted in the same areas of the country. In the same epoch the cult of Stambheśvarī, the other important goddess-cult of Orissa having been Sanskritised during the Gupta age, crossed the limits of its original territorial nucleus, located in south-western Orissa, to reach the central part of the State (the present Dhenkanal district), where this goddess, as is evinced by epigraphic records, became the family deity of the Śulki dynasty of Kodālaka *maṇḍala* (*ca.* AD 600-900).[52]

In the same period the emerging political power of south Orissa represented by the Śailodbhava dynasty of Koṅgoda *maṇḍala* brought about a qualitative change in Śakti cult in the regional level. The period of reign of the Śailodbhavas started in around the middle part of the sixth century AD, from which time the close alliance of Śāktism and Śaivism — the big religious novelty introduced by the these monarchs in the post-Gupta epoch — is clearly attested to by the Hindu temple art of Bhubaneswar.

The kingdom of Koṅgoda, extending from the river Vaitarani in the north to the river Rishikulya in the south, roughly comprised the modern Ganjam and Puri districts; its capital city, described by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang (first half of the seventh century AD), was situated on the bank of the river Salima in proximity to Chilika Lake. Hiuen Tsang's account indicates that Koṅgoda was a rich and powerful country at the time of his visit. In the same period, the kingdom fell for some decades under the domination of foreign rulers (the king Śaśāṅka of Gauḍa or Bengal, the emperor Harṣavardhana of Kanauj and, probably, also the Cālukya king Pulakeśin II); yet, soon after these events, it regained its independence and started to acquire wealth and power through maritime trade and colonial expansion oversea. Some scholars are of the opinion that the Śailendra dynasty of Java, that in the eighth-tenth centuries AD built a vast and prosperous maritime empire that included Sumatra, Borneo, Bali and the Malaya peninsula, was a branch of the Śailodbhavas, with this possibly indicating that Koṅgoda had, for a while, the predominance over the Indian colonists who in that historical period increasingly established themselves in South-East Asia. The maritime activities of the *sādhavas* (merchants) of Koṅgoda, sailing off from the numerous sea and river ports situated along the coast of the kingdom and especially round Chilika Lake, were likely to provide the accumulation of resources that provided the economic basis for the subsequent expansion of the Bhauma-kara kingdom, which in the mid-part of the eighth century AD put an end to the Śailodbhava rule over South Orissa.[53]

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[51] H.C. Das, 'Religious History of Balasore', in S. Pani and H.C. Das, eds., *Glimpses of History and Culture of Balasore*, Bhubaneswar, 1988, p. 267.

[52] A.K. Rath, *Studies on Some Aspects of the History and Culture of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1987, pp. 82-3.

DIFFUSION OF PĀŚUPATA ŚAIVISM IN ORISSA

As is known from their copper-plate grants, all celebrating the glory of Śiva, the Śailodbhavas patronised Śaivism.[54]

Śaivism is one of the oldest religions of India, and its origins, as notoriously hypothesised by a section of indologists, whose champion is A. Daniélou, may be traced back to the Indo-Mediterranean Neolithic civilisation stream, represented in India by the Dravidian peoples. In Orissa, Śaivism might have existed, in some form or another, from very early times. In a similar way to primitive Śāktism, it might also have borrowed a good deal of religio-cultural contributions from the Munda-speaking tribes, which might have interacted with the elements pertaining to the Dravidian civilisation proper.[55] Phallic worship, fertility festivals, sexual magic rites, initiation to mysteries and proto-yogic practices might have been the salient characteristics of this supposed primitive form of Śaivism. Be that as it may, the rise of Śaivism in full-fledged form is traceable in Orissa, on a firm archaeological basis, from about the fifth century AD, at which time, under the probable impulse of the grandiose revival of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism patronised by the Gupta emperors, this faith clearly gained the pre-eminence over Buddhism and Jainism, which had been till then the dominant faiths of the Āryanised rulers of the Kaliṅga country.[56] It was especially Buddhism that, as earlier suggested, was harshly opposed in that epoch by the Oriyā Śaivas, while the latter were apparently much more tolerant toward Jainism.

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[53] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-4, 76 and 463-4; K.S. Behera, 'Ancient Orissa/Kalinga and Indonesia: The Maritime Contacts', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 251.

[54] H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', p. 114.

[55] L.K. Panda, 'Rise of Shaivism in Orissa in the Pre-Christian Era', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXX, No. 1, pp. 26-30.

[56] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

By the fifth century AD Śaivism had already established its ascendancy in south-western Orissa with becoming the official creed of the Nalas and of the Eastern Gaṅgas, who at that time were respectively ruling over the regions of Koraput-Bastar and of Ganjam.[57] The predominantly tribal district of Koraput has been probably the cradle of Śaivism since very ancient times, attracting people of all castes and yet maintaining the indigenous Śaiva tradition. The forest-clad hill tracts of the district, rich in rock-cut caves, were possibly one of the favourite abodes of the ancient Śaiva ascetics of Orissa. The colossal *svayambhū-liṅga* of Guptesvara cave in the thick jungle of Koraput district has been probably venerated by local tribesmen since pre-historic times.[58] In the far northern district of Keonjhar, the rock-cut caves of Dengaposi and Sitabhinji, meant for the penance of the Śaiva ascetics and associated with the early Bhañja kings, are assigned by the scholars to the fourth-fifth centuries AD, with this testifying to the early diffusion of Śaivism in North Orissa as well.[59] The earliest image of Śiva Naṭarāja recovered from Orissa, possibly dating back to the third-fourth centuries AD, was found at Asanpat near Sitabhinj. At the natural rock shelters of Sitabhinj, a *mukhaliṅgam* is to be found, which is possibly as old as the aforesaid image of Śiva Naṭarāja. At Punjiama, a village located in the Banpur area, several image of Śiva in a dancing pose and of the same god in Bhairava form, dating from the sixth-seventh centuries AD, have been recovered.[60] The ascent of the Śaiva faith in the tribal tracts at issue during the Gupta age should prove fairly enough that Śaivism, in a similar way to Śāktism, was originally a popular religion among the non-Āryan tribes inhabiting the inland hill tracts of Orissa. Besides this, there is also some archaeological evidence that Śaivism, by the fifth century AD, had become the dominant faith in the Bhubaneswar area, previously dominated by Buddhism.[61]

On the basis of the positive evidence provided by the earliest extant temples of Bhubaneswar, the beginning of Hindu temple-building activity on a large scale can be dated in Orissa from the Śailodbhava period, although it is also certain that other temples (for instance, the original sanctuary dedicated to goddess Virajā at Kalaspur near Jajpur) were erected at a still earlier stage of Orissan history. Owing to the invasions of Śaśāṅka, Harṣavardhana and Pulakeśin II in the first half of the seventh century AD, the Kaliṅga country, and particularly the kingdom of Koṅgoda, became the zone of assimilation of the best of several elements from the crucial contemporary art zones of India, soon developing a regional school of its own known as the Kaliṅga School of Art and Architecture.[62] The earliest Hindu temples having survived in Orissa, represented by the Satrughneśvara group, by the Svarṇajāleśvara and by the Paraśurāmeśvara (all located in the city of Bhubaneswar), are generally assigned to a period stretching from the closing part of the sixth century up to the mid-part of the seventh century AD.[63] These temples, which are all Śaivite, are unanimously believed to have been erected by the Śailodbhava kings, the then rulers of the Bhubaneswar region, although there is no evidence whatsoever to support such an assumption.

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[57] H.C. Das, *art. cit.*, p. 113.

[58] H.C. Das, 'Religious Movements in Southern Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXV, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 28.

[59] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-5.

[60] B.K. Rath, 'Sculptural Art of Orissa', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 110; K.S. Behera, *Temples of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1993, p. 15.

[61] K.C. Panigrahi, *op.cit.*, pp. 313-4.

The Lakulīśa images carved on some early Bhubaneswar temples indicate that

> the particular sect which brought about transformation in the religion of the people and gave impetus to temple-building was the Pāśupata sect, of which Lakulīśa, a Śaiva teacher, was the organiser.[64]

Pāśupata Śaivism became a sort of State religion under the patronage of the Śailodbhava dynasty. The founder or systematiser of the sect, Lakulin, who was probably an historical figure having lived in the first or second century of the Christian era, was deified (in Orissa as elsewhere in India) as Lakulīśa, an aspect of Śiva as supreme spiritual teacher. He is depicted on the walls of most of early Orissan temples as holding his typical attribute, the staff (*lakuṭa*), in images resembling very much the iconography of Buddha (whose veneration, deeply rooted in ancient Orissa, the Pāśupatas strove in this way to replace with that of Śiva).[65]

Lakulin's teachings, forming the most ancient Śaivite doctrine among those originated in North India, were pivoted upon the divine figure of Paśupati (the Lord-of-Animals), a form of Śiva whose theological conception was under some aspects, alien to the Vedic conception of Rudra. The animals hinted at by this name are the souls of Śiva's devotees, who are freed by the ties of existence by the all-powerful god as the animals are freed from their chains by their guardian. Spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*) consisted for the Pāśupatas in a mystic communion with Śiva, who was conceived as supreme *Brahman*, a transcendent being whose nature is absolutely different from that of common (uninitiated) human beings. The dualistic monotheism of the Pāśupata sect was philosophically based on the principles of the Sāṁkhya-*darśana*, while the Yoga-*darśana* furnished them with the ascetic practices aiming at obtaining spiritual reintegration. These very ancient yogic practices, mixed with some rather odd observances esteemed to go against common morals, such as snoring, laughing, hobbling, doing foolish things, talking nonsense, going round naked or half-naked, behaving like sweethearts, etc., and with some magico-religious rites such as uttering *mantras*, performing circumambulations, bathing with ashes, etc., were believed to have the power of conferring on the perfect *siddheśvara* (he who has realised God) some superhuman powers such as seeing the subtle world, hearing any distant sound, reading one's thoughts, assuming any shape, a perfect omniscience, etc.[66]

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[62] K.V. Soundara Rajan, *Early Kalinga Art and Architecture*, Delhi, 1984, p. 73.

[63] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, Leiden, 1985, p. 19.

[64] D. Mitra, *Bhubaneswar*, 5th edn., New Delhi, 1984, p. 10.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

THE PĀŚUPATAS AND ŚĀKTISM

The supreme god venerated by the orthodox Pāśupatas was conceived as an exclusively male being. The androgynous conception of the godhead as the union of the male and the female principles, which was very common in the doctrines of other early medieval Śaiva sects, does not seem, therefore, to pertain to the Pāśupata tradition. Also ritual love-making and blood sacrifice, both practised on a large scale by some extreme Śaiva sects such as the Kāpālikas and the Kālāmukhas (who are generally believed to have seceded from the Pāśupatas in the post-Gupta period, and who were later on rather inclined to follow the Śākta rituals), were not part of this tradition; in fact, Lakulin's teachings gave a great importance to sexual abstinence and non-injury, which were incompatible with the aforesaid Tāntric observances.[67]

At any rate, the Pāśupatas of Orissa apparently showed a heterodox attitude toward the doctrines elsewhere upheld by the sect. In fact, the above-mentioned early Śaiva temples of Bhubaneswar — which, as it seems, were run by groups of Pāśupata priests — display a blend of Śaiva and Śākta images, with this testifying to an early syncreticism between the two faiths there. The images of Pārvatī, Mahiṣamardinī and Siṁhavāhinī Durgā, Umāmaheśvara, Ardhanārīśvara, the marriage scene of Śiva and Pārvatī, Saptamātṛkās, variously carved on the walls of the said temples, clearly indicate that, in the post-Gupta period, the Pāśupatas of Bhubaneswar, unlike most of their co-religionists, had already embraced the female principle and were regularly worshipping it side by side with the male one. Also Siṁhanātha temple, situated on an island of the Mahanadi, and the recently discovered Bhavānī-Śaṅkara temple at Bhubaneswar, both Śaivite and assignable to the late Śailodbhava period,[68] have some beautiful Śākta or Śaiva-Śākta images carved on their walls (Saptamātṛkās and Mahiṣamardinī in the first case, Umāmaheśvara in the second), with this testifying to the interaction of Śaivism and Śāktism all through the term of the Śailodbhava rule. Furthermore, the temple of Siṁhanātha — a deity personifying the lion aspect of both Śiva and Viṣṇu — presents some images depicting Kṛṣṇa as engaged in killing different demons (the ogress Pūtanā, the serpent Kālīya), which fact appears very interesting in view of their being placed near the Mahiṣamardinī image serving as one of the *pārśva-devatās* of the temple. Such a disposition of sacred imagery along the temple walls was possibly meant to emphasise the affinity between the function of Kṛṣṇa and the one of the Devī as slayers of *asuras* menacing the stability of the cosmos.

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[66] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. L'Induismo recente*, Milano, 1981, pp. 273-8.

[67] *Ibid.*, pp. 276-7.

[68] C.L. Fabri, *History of the Art of Orissa*, Bombay (etc.), 1974, p. 131; K. C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 377. Some other scholars, however, assign the two said temples to the Bhauma-kara period: see T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

It must be also pointed out here that some copper-plates of the Śailodbhava kings record in their invocatory verses the union of Pārvatī with Śiva.[69] The Buguda copper-plate grant of Mādhavavarman II (early seventh century) mentions the shrines of Rāmacaṇḍī and Umāmaheśvara at Krishnagiri near Khallikote, an important centre of Śaivism combined with Śāktism. Moreover, the story of Bhagīratha bringing down the Ganges from heaven to the sea, recorded in the Śailodbhava charters, bespeaks the glorification of goddess Gaṅgā, a manifestation of Śakti that is closely associated with Śiva inasmuch as she is regarded as the latter's second spouse after Pārvatī.[70] From the Śailodbhava period onwards, following the Gupta art canons, the images of the river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā were almost invariably depicted on the door jambs of Orissan temples as auspicious door-guardians, whose role was probably that of removing symbolically the devotee's pollution while he crossed the threshold of the temple by exerting on him the same effect of a purificatory bath in the waters of the two most sacred rivers of India[71] (*Pls.* I and II and *figs.* 44 & 45).

It can be, thus, said that the spread of Pāśupata Śaivism under the patronage of the Śailodbhavas highlighted, at one time, also Śāktism, a form of religion that was possibly more rooted in Orissan cultures than Śaivism itself. This notwithstanding, such a mixed form of religion is not definable as left-hand Tāntric yet; rather, the first trends of Hinduism in coastal Orissa, as is evincible through a scrutiny of the imagery carved on the outside walls of the above-mentioned temples, 'were those of sublime Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, with Epic and Purāṇic overtones and benign Śaivism'.[72]

The Pāśupatas of Koṅgoda and their royal protectors were probably compelled to make common cause with Śāktism and to go side by side with it due to the strong rootedness of female-oriented cults among the tribal and the semi-tribal folk of Orissa and their feudal chiefs, only in part Āryanised. Such early Śākta-Pāśupata cult liaison appears to have formed the basis of the later *vāmācāra* (left-hand Tāntric) evolution of Śaivism and Śāktism, which characterised the Bhauma-kara period in Orissa. The penetration of some extreme Tāntric sects such as the Kāpālikas and, later on, the Kaulas into the region during the medieval epoch was thus made easier by the cult synthesis first operated by the Pāśupatas of Orissa. At the same time, the heterodox concessions made by the sect to Śāktism gradually led to the former's extinction on the territory of the State, which came to be an accomplished fact at the beginning of the Somavaṁśī rule (tenth century AD).[73] Śaivism combined with Śāktism, however, continued to be the dominant faith in Orissa till the advent of the Imperial Gaṅgas (twelfth century AD), who patronised Vaiṣṇavism above all other faiths, particularly in its regional form known as Jagannātha cult. Thus, it can be concluded here, Orissan art and architecture were virtually at the absolute service of the allied Śaiva-Śākta cults for about six centuries starting from the sixth century AD.

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[69] H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, p. 109.

[70] H.C. Das, 'Religious Movements in Southern Orissa', p. 36.

[71] D. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, Delhi (etc.), 1986, pp. 191-2.

[72] K.V. Soundara Rajan, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

ANCIENT ŚĀKTA SHRINES OF KOṄGODA

The Śailodbhavas were, most likely, responsible for the Āryanisation of a number of tribal female deities worshipped since pre-historic times in the hill tracts of southern Orissa. The earliest extant Orissan image of Cāmuṇḍā — the fiercest and most blood-thirsty form assumed by the Devī — is represented by an example coming from Bankada in the Banpur area, a village built on the site at which the ancient capital city of Koṅgoda once probably stood.[74] The free-standing image at issue, dating from *ca.* the seventh century AD, is now preserved in the Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar. Cāmuṇḍā, making her first appearance in Sanskrit literature in the *Devī-Māhātmya*, could have been initially a tribal 'Mother', as her very name — etymologically connected, according to some scholars,[75] with the Munda-speaking tribes (Sanskrit Muṇḍā) — may indicate. The skeleton-like Cāmuṇḍā image from Bankada is four-armed. The goddess is seated in *padmāsana* on a low lotus cushion, under which two vases and an owl — Cāmuṇḍā's early *vāhana* (celestial mount), later on replaced by a recumbent corpse — are depicted. A human skull is fixed on the goddess' elaborate coiffure. The archaic iconographic features displayed by this image (which is very similar to the one belonging to the Saptamātṛkā set carved in bas-relief on Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Bhubaneswar) were possibly inspired by some tribal sculptural specimen (*Pl.* XVI and *fig.* 10).

The aniconic cults consecrated to goddess Bhagavatī at Banpur and to the twin goddesses Tārā and Tāriṇī (installed on the top of a hill overlooking the Rishikulya river), which certainly originated from the tribal religious cultures of southern Orissa, seem to have risen to regional eminence under the patronage of the Śailodbhava kings.[76] Therefore, they can be considered as some among the earliest Sanskritised Śākta cults of Orissa. Goddess Bhagavatī, worshipped in aniconic form till recent times, is the presiding deity of the Banpur tract of the Māls (the wild hilly country lying in between the lake of Chilika and the city of Nayagarh, mostly inhabited by Saora and Kondh communities). The area of Banpur was anciently an important Buddhist centre as well as a seat of Nāga-worship.[77] The shrine of Bhagavatī, having been probably established by the Śailodbhava rulers in the seventh-eighth centuries AD, is now one of the most celebrated Śākta centres of Orissa. Human sacrifices are believed to have been once performed there at regular intervals. In fact, there is still a family clan in Banpur, the Balijenā one, claiming itself to have been traditionally appointed in offering one of its family members to the goddess once in a year as a sacrificial victim. The Balijenās were accorded land grants by their kings in exchange for their terrible service. At any rate, it is reported that one day the goddess told the clan's leader in dream that such a terrible ritual practice needed not to be continued any longer. After this intimation, human sacrifices came to an end in Banpur.[78]

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[73] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[74] R.P. Mohapatra, 'Forts and Palaces of Orissa', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 124.

[75] B. Bhattacharya, *Śaivism and the Phallic World*, New Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta, 1975, I, p. 253.

[76] K.C. Mishra, *The Cult of Jagannātha*, 2nd edn., Calcutta, 1984, p. 20; H. C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, p. 109.

Human victims were once sacrificed with regularity also at the other important Śākta *pīṭha* presumably established by the Śailodbhavas in South Orissa, namely, the one of Tārā-Tāriṇī. Human sacrifices modelled on the *Meriah* tradition of the Kondhs were in vogue there till the advent of the British rule. It is worth noticing, in this regard, that one of the names of the Kondh earth-goddess, to whom the *Meriah* sacrifice was offered in the past, is Tara Penu (in Kui, the Dravidian language spoken by the Kondhs, *tara* means earth, while *penu* means a deity[79]). The sister goddesses Tārā and Tāriṇī are worshipped at the shrine in question in the shape of two stones which are regarded as the breasts of Satī, having fallen to the spot in course of Śiva's mad wandering across the sky.[80] The shrine is also connected in some legends with the merchant class. In the time of the Śailodbhavas, Oriyā merchants, as above suggested, used to sail off regularly from the ports of Koṅgoda to reach the far away countries of South-East Asia. To assure themselves the divine blessing over their maritime activities, they used to install different gods and goddesses in the confluence of rivers, in the ports and in other important water channels. Since the terminal tract of the river Rishikulya was anciently open to navigation, it is highly probable that the shrine of Tārā-Tāriṇī was originally meant, among other things, to protect the maritime activities of the *sādhavas* of Koṅgoda.[81]

Another Śākta shrine having been probably established by the Śailodbhava kings is that dedicated to Śikharacaṇḍī (Caṇḍī-of-the-Peak), located on the top of a beautiful hillock rising near the village of Patia, about eight km to the north of Bhubaneswar (now in the town itself). This small temple has been recently rebuilt, but its original architectural features (the flat roof covered by a low spire made of horizontal platforms, the absence of *maṇḍapa*, the use of big blocks of stone) remind of the characteristics of the Gupta architectural style.[82] Although some scholars have assigned it to the Gupta period,[83] this shrine, or at least its presiding deity, is more likely to date from the post-Gupta period. In fact, the image of its presiding deity, a very badly worn eight-armed image of Mahiṣamardinī carved out of the monolithic slab that forms the back wall of the temple itself, is stylistically very similar to the images of the same class found in the Vaitāl Ḍeul and in the Śiśireśvara temple at Bhubaneswar (both belonging to the eighth century AD), of which it may represent one of the possible prototypes.[84]

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[77] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 455.

[78] *Vijaya*, Madras and Bhubaneswar, November 1995, p. 31 (in Oriyā).

[79] V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, London, 1954, p. 641.

[80] H.C. Das, 'Religious Movements in Southern Orissa', p. 35.

[81] H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, pp. 107-8.

ANCIENT ŚĀKTA SHRINES OF WESTERN ORISSA

Śakti cult developed at a very early date also outside the historical boundaries of Koṅgoda. In the western districts of Orissa, in fact, its oldest vestiges date possibly back to the Gupta epoch.

In the days of the Gupta emperors the modern Orissan districts of Sambalpur and Balangir were considered part of the Mahākośala region, having its centre in the Chhatisgarh tract of present Madhya Pradesh, while the districts of Kalahandi and Koraput, along with that of Bastar in Madhya Pradesh, were included, as it seems, within the limits of the ill-defined Mahākāntāra region.[85] In all probability, those vast forest-clad hill tracts of west Orissa were then inhabited almost exclusively by non-Āryan peoples, among whom female-oriented cults could have prevailed. A goddess named Kāntāravāsinī (the Guardian-of-the-Forest), possibly the tribal presiding deity of Mahākāntāra (the Great Forest), is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*.[86] The process of Sanskritisation of such cults, promoted by local ruling dynasties, may have already started during the Gupta age, as it is possibly indicated by the existence of ancient Śākta remains in the villages of Charda (thirty km to the north of Sonepur), Asurgarh (thirty-five km to the north-east of Bhawanipatna) and Trisul (in the valley of the river Maraguda).

The tutelary deity of the village of Charda, popularly known as Chardei Devī, is represented by the image of a six-armed goddess in a standing pose with the head bent leftwards (according to the description furnished by local priests). Some Orissan scholars assign this image to *ca.* the fifth-sixth centuries AD,[87] which would make it the earliest extant Śākta image in the whole upper Mahanadi Valley. At Asurgarh, the excavation of an ancient fort, whose foundation is traced back to the Mauryan period,[88] has revealed the existence of a circular brick structure that was probably a temple of the great Goddess as evinced by some terracotta figurines unearthed there, representing a goddess and different animals. These ruins are assigned to *ca.* the fifth century AD.[89] Finally, a Śākta brick temple, possibly dating from the fifth century AD, has been brought to light during the excavation of a mound located at Trisul in the Maraguda Valley (which was an ancient centre of Nāga-worship too). Its presiding deity, a four-armed image of Mahiṣamardinī depicted in *ālīḍha* (archer's) pose with the demon in theriomorphic form and the lion at her feet, appears to be the earliest image of this deity found in Kalahandi district.[90]

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[82] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[83] K.S. Behera, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[84] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

[85] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

[86] R.N. Dash, 'Elements of Mother Goddess among the Tribals of Orissa', in K. C. Mishra, T. Mishra and R.K. Mishra, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 129.

Starting from the ninth century AD, under the rule of the Somavaṁśī dynasty of Dakṣiṇa Kośala, the western region of Orissa became one of the most important areas of diffusion of Śakti-worship in the State, as is shown by its numerous shrines variously consecrated to the cults of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, Saptamātṛkās and Sixty-Four Yoginīs. But this already forms the argument of a subsequent section.

Śakta-tantrism in the Bhauma epoch

The monarchs of the Bhauma-kara dynasty (*ca.* AD 736-945) established, for the first time after Khāravela, a strong kingdom covering the whole of present Orissa except the north-western region known as Dakṣiṇa Kośala. The capital city of the Bhauma-kara kingdom was located in the area of Jajpur, the seat of goddess Virajā. The Bhauma-kara epoch was marked for political, social and religious renaissance in the country. In the initial part of the Bhauma rule Mahāyāna Buddhism was a sort of State religion, yet the members of the dynasty showed a great tolerance also towards Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, till they ultimately became Hinduised. This period of Orissan history was marked for the creeping of Tantrism into both Buddhism and Hinduism and by the impetuous ascent of Śākta-Tāntric cults in the region, either in alliance with Śaivism and Buddhism or independently from these.

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[87] N. Senapati and N.K. Sahu, eds., *Balangir District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1968, p. 481.

[88] R.P. Mohapatra, *art. cit.*, pp. 121-2.

[89] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Kalahandi District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1980, p. 36.

[90] *Kalahandi District Gazetteer*, p. 39; J. P. Singhdeo, 'Temples of Nawapara Sub-Division', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXIV, Nos. 1 and 2, pp. 19-21.

ORIGIN OF THE BHAUMA DYNASTY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ŚĀKTA-TANTRISM

The entire history of the Bhauma-kara dynasty is quite emblematic of the modalities of expansion of Śāktism in Orissa in a period marked for the integration of goddess-cults with Śaivism and Mahāyāna Buddhism on the common religious background formed by the Tāntric ideals and practices then in ascent in the Oriyā society. Both the main theories formulated by the scholars in Orissan history to explain the origin of the Bhauma-kara dynasty are very meaningful in relation to the triumph of Śākta-Tantrism in Orissa that took place during the period of rule of the dynasty.

In the view of B. Mishra,[91] the Bhauma-karas could have originally belonged to the Bhuiya tribe, now settled in the northern hill tracts of Orissa (especially in the district of Keonjhar). This once powerful non-Āryan autochthonous tribe, although it has ultimately become Hinduised by adopting the caste system and the Brāhmaṇical ritualistic pattern,[92] still retains some of its ancient matriarchal or pre-patriarchal customs. For instance, Bhuiyan women, like the female members of several other non-Āryan tribes of Middle India, enjoy a much greater freedom than Hindu women. The hypothesis, put forward by B. Mishra, of the Bhuiya origin of the Bhauma dynasty could well explain the custom, followed by the latter all along the term of its rule, of according full right to succession to the throne to the female members of the family. During the Bhauma epoch as many as six queens ruled over Orissa with full powers and all sovereign titles. Barring the Muslim dynasties, this is one of the few cases in Indian history in which one finds women occupying the throne as the successors of their husbands or fathers, the only other examples of such a custom being traceable in the histories of Kashmir and of Andhra Pradesh respectively.[93]

It, thus, appears very probable that women held a pre-eminent position in the management of the affairs of the Bhauma kingdom, this being possibly a consequence of the tribal origin of the royal family itself. It has been stated in chapter 1 that Kaliṅgan noblewomen probably enjoyed a high social status already in the age of king Khāravela (second-first century BC), as is evinced by some early sculptures carved on the rock-cut caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri. The hiatus of about eight centuries between the age of Khāravela and the beginning of the Bhauma epoch as regards the archaeological and epigraphic witnesses of the role played by woman in the political and social life of Orissa does not allow one to draw any definite conclusion about this matter; nevertheless, it may be conjectured that, in a semi-tribal and probably pre-patriarchal social system such as that of ancient Kaliṅga was, the intermediate period in question was likewise characterised by a high position of woman in all walks of life.

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[91] B. Mishra, *Orissa under the Bhauma Kings*, Calcutta, 1934, pp. 80 ff.

[92] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

It cannot be a mere coincidence that the period of Orissan history ranging from the age of Khāravela to the Bhauma-kara epoch was marked for the female principle's constant growth in importance in the religious sphere as well, nor that the ultimate triumph of Śakti-worship occurred in Orissa in the heyday of the Bhauma-kara rule, when women were playing so relevant a role in administration and social life. In other words, there seems to exist a historical link between the Śākta expansion in Orissa and the high status enjoyed there by women from ancient times to the early medieval period. Such a historical phenomenon is only explainable by admitting the persistence of some matriarchal or pre-patriarchal culture elements in all the strata of the Oriyā society till a relatively late date (at least till the Bhauma-kara epoch included). In the subsequent stages of medieval Orissan history, when the female members of the royal families were no longer allowed to exercise so great a power as the female members of the Bhauma dynasty had done,[94] and when woman's position in the society appears to have altogether lowered, there was also an evident decline of Śakti-worship in the country: by the Gaṅga epoch (AD 1110-1434), indeed, the period of ascent of Śāktism in Orissa was over, Śakti-worship having mostly turned into a subordinate, although indispensable component of the cult pattern observed at the temples dedicated to the chief Hindu male divinities.

An alternative hypothesis concerning the origin of the Bhauma-kara dynasty, more recently formulated by K.C. Panigrahi,[95] is equally of great moment as regards the appraisal of the influence exerted by this royal dynasty on the evolution of Śākta-Tantrism in Orissa. According to Panigrahi's view, the Bhauma-karas could have been the descendants of the Bhāgadatta ruling family of Assam, that under king Harṣa or Harṣavarman probably succeeded in conquering Bengal and Orissa and in keeping them for some time under the Assamese rule in the early eighth century AD. Thus, it is possible that the Bhaumas started to reign over Orissa as the feudatories of the kings of Assam, to whose family they perhaps belonged, and that they became independent from the latter after AD 736.

According to the same scholar, a non-Āryan origin of the Bhauma-kara family appears probable also in this case, so that the above-suggested considerations about the possible connection between the position of first rank enjoyed by women in the Bhauma kingdom and the triumph of Śakti cult in Orissa in the early medieval period do not lose for this reason their validity. Tribal Assam, in fact, is still now rich either in matriarchal remainders and in goddess-cults similar to the Hindu ones, and it must have been ever more so during the early medieval period, when the Bhauma-karas perhaps migrated from it into Orissa to became subsequently the ruling family of the country. Moreover, Assam, bordering on both Tibet and Bengal, was in those days one of the principal areas of diffusion and propagation of the

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[94] *Ibid.*, p. 267.

[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 67-9.

Vajrayānic (Tāntric) form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, that was also the official faith of the early Bhauma-kara kings. It is stated in the Tibetan tradition that a Tibetan monk converted an Orissan king (possibly Kṣemaṅkaradeva, the founder of the Bhauma dynasty) to Buddhism.[96]

DIFFUSION OF TĀNTRIC BUDDHISM IN THE BHAUMA KINGDOM

In the course of the eighth century AD the powerful Tu-fan kingdom (Tibet) extended for some time its political and cultural influence as far as the lower Ganges Valley. Some Tibetan chronicles state that between AD 750 and AD 850 the Tibetan kings succeeded in including within their southern dominions the territories of Nepal, Assam, northern Bihar, and part of Bengal.[97] Thus, it does not appear unlikely that the Bhaumas — in the hypothesis they were of the Assamese origin — may have been directly influenced by the Tibeto-Himālayan currents of Vajrayāna Buddhism during the early phases of their dynastic history, or that — in the alternative hypothesis according to which they were the autochthonous inhabitants of Orissa — they may have adopted some of the religio-cultural traditions of their powerful Tibetan neighbours.

The worship of goddess Tārā, based on the Śākta principle and representing an essential aspect of Mahāyāna Buddhism as well as, more pronouncedly, of its later developed Vajrayānic form, seems to have been in vogue in Tibet since the seventh century AD.[98] The overall Śākta-Tāntric ritualistic system is often referred to in Indian texts as *cīnācāra* ('the Chinese conduct'), with reference to its having originated in Great China (Tibet).[99] Many scholars have attributed to Śākta-Tāntric rites a Central Asian origin and have striven to trace their origin, at least as regards some aspects of theirs, to the penetration of Mongolian shamanism into South Asia.[100] In Bengal and Bihar, which very much felt the Tibetan influence, the Pāla monarchs became from this time onwards the great patronisers of Tāntric Buddhism.

Again in this connection, Kāmarūpa in Assam, included for some time among the Tibetan dominions, is mentioned in the *Hevajra-tantra*, a Buddhist work that must have existed in its present form by the eighth century AD, as one of the four *pīṭhas* (the great seats of goddess-worship) of Vajrayāna Buddhism.[101] Uḍḍīyāna, another of the *pīṭhas* being mentioned in that work, has been identified by some scholars with Oḍra or Orissa, even though there is no unanimity at all on this controversial point. In fact, on the basis of the available literary evidence (provided especially by Hiuen Tsang's accounts), a large section of scholars are inclined to identify Uḍḍīyāna with the Swat Valley in Pakistan (which, unlike Orissa, is nevertheless devoid of Tāntric Buddhist relics).[102] However, as opined by P. Pal, 'it is fruitless to try and identify the *pīṭhas* with exact geographical locations for the *pīṭhas* exist only in the mind and the body of the Tāntric',[103] namely, they would collectively symbolise, on the macrocosmic plane, the universe with its directions and, on the microcosmic one, the Tāntric adept's body when homologised with the universe in the *nyāsa* ceremony (consisting of the ritual projection of divinities into different parts of the body).

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[96] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[97] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 86; C. Blunder and M. Elvin, *Atlante della Cina*, Novara, 1990, pp. 92-3.

[98] K.K. Dasgupta, 'Iconography of Tārā', in D. C. Sircar, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 123.

[99] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. L'Induismo recente*, p. 72.

[100] M. Biardeau, *L'Induismo. Antropologia di una civiltà*, Milano, 1985, pp. 185-6.

[101] P. Pal, 'The Fifty-One Śākta Pīṭhas', in I.S.Me.O., ed., *Orientalia. Iosephi Tucci memoriae dicata*, *Serie Orientale*, vol. LVI (1988), pp. 1046-7 and n. 15.

To confine the discussion to the spread of Tāntric Buddhism over Orissa under the rule of the Bhauma kings, it can be summed up here that there appears to be a precise chronological relation among the emergence of this form of religion in Tibet, Nepal, Assam, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa respectively in the seventh-eighth centuries AD. The supposed political and cultural links between Tibet and north-eastern India in that historical period, as well as, in the specific case of Orissa, the possible Assamese origin of the Bhauma-kara family, may contribute to explain such a course of things.

It can be furthermore added to this that the hypothesis of the Assamese origin of the Bhauma-karas could well explain why this dynasty backed up the left-hand Tāntric sect of the Kāpālikas, which during its period of reign flourished in Orissa with the support of royal patronage. The affiliates to that sect, in fact, used to perform some very archaic rituals akin to the ones that were anciently in vogue among some of the primitive tribes settled in eastern India, Indo-China, Indonesia and Oceania,[104] such as the ceremonial use of human skulls, human sacrifice, etc., while the region of Assam — the possible homeland of the Bhauma-karas, wedged in between Bengal and Indo-China — was once one of the principal areas of diffusion of the tribal religious practices in question. This may have been one of the possible factors that, if the view according to which the Bhaumas were originally the members of a non-Āryan tribe of Assam is accepted, led the members of this dynasty to favour the gruesome Tāntric practices performed by the Kāpālikas, which could well have reminded the Bhauma monarchs of the tribal rituals performed long before by their Assamese forefathers. It is, furthermore, stated by R.C. Hazra that the Kāpālika form of Śaivism was prevalent in Kāmarūpa (Assam) during the early medieval period,[105] possibly also in the days when the supposed ancestors of the Bhauma-karas of Orissa were residing there.

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[102] N.K. Sahu, *Buddhism in Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1958, pp. 142-7; N. N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 118; K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-9.

[103] P. Pal, *art. cit.*, p. 1049.

[104] P. Filippani-Ronconi, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-8.

[105] R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upa-Purāṇas*, II, Calcutta, 1963, p. 31.

The contribution of elements of Himālayan Tāntric Buddhism and of Assamese tribal animism from the early Bhauma rulers might have, thus, enriched of some new tesserae the complicate mosaic of Orissan Śāktism, in whose bosom various female-oriented cults of the Munda, Dravidian and Vedic origin had already amalgamated starting at least from the Gupta period. This multilinear process of contamination of cults, admitted that it took place in the above-described terms, must have developed through the intermediation of Bengal, a geographic area which was historically one of the cradles of Śākta-Tantrism.

It was thus starting from the phase of patronisation of Vajrayāna Buddhism by the Bhauma monarchs (eighth century AD) that Śakti cult took a new shape in Orissa. It must be mentioned here that some Orissan scholars even believe that this form of Buddhism was elaborated in Orissa itself in the course of the sixth century AD out of the fold of Mahāyānism.[106] The Mahāyāna Buddhist monastic establishments on the Assia Hills (Udayagiri, Lalitagiri and Ratnagiri) in Cuttack district, which during the Bhauma epoch became centres of Tāntric Buddhist learning and *yoga* of international fame,[107] started their activity at least from the late Gupta age, as is demonstrated by an inscription in the cursive Gupta script found at Ratnagiri and assigned by R.P. Chanda to the sixth century AD.[108]

Starting from the seventh century AD, the influence of the Buddhist cult of Tārā in her various manifestations, inspired in a greater or smaller measure by Tantrism, began to be felt in the religious scenery of Orissa, following the general trend then prevailing in Tibet and in the eastern part of the Indian sub-continent. Goddess Tārā, the supreme Śakti of Mahāyāna Buddhists, identified by the latter as the primordial female energy who enables one to surmount all sorts of dangers and calamities, with her various subsidiary forms and emanations, being as a whole akin to the concept about the multifarious aspects of the great Goddess of the Hindus, absorbed into her cult, like the latter, a great deal of tribal and folk female deities of Orissa. A new form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, deeply influenced by Śākta-Tantrism, arose from this religio-cultural process.

The most noticeable Orissan sculptural specimens of Buddhist female deities influenced by Śākta-Tantrism and assignable to the Bhauma period or to a slightly later period are Khādiravaṇī Tārā at Banpur, the bronze figures of Tārā, Vajratārā, Ugratārā, Heruka, Bhṛkuṭi, Pāṇḍarā, Cuṇḍā and Kurukullā from Achyutarajpur (preserved in the Orissa State Museum), Mārīcī at Rāmacaṇḍī temple near Konarak, Prajñāpāramitā of Vanesvaranasi, the examples of Tārā, Aparājitā, Herukā, Hārītī and Kurukullā from the Assia Hills, Prajñāpāramitā and the Buddhist specimen of Gaṅgā at Cuttack (both recovered from Udayagiri), Tārā and Mārīcī of Kendrapara (both recovered from the Assia Hills), Tārā,

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[106] H.C. Das, 'Heritage of Orissa', in Id., ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 9.

[107] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

[108] R.P. Chanda, *art. cit.*, p. 5.

Vajravārāhī and Herukā from Chaudwar, Vajratārā and Mārīcī of Ayodhya, Tārā and Mārīcī from Khiching.[109]

The weapons, attitudes, body poses and celestial mounts variously attributed to these Mahāyāna Buddhist *śakti*s forming some among the best specimens of the early medieval Tāntric art of Orissa resemble in many cases the iconographic features of coeval Tāntric goddesses belonging to the Brāhmaṇical pantheon. Kurukullā and Herukā, for instance, wear a garland of human heads and dance on a corpse like the Hindu goddess Cāmuṇḍā and some of the Sixty-Four Yoginīs. Kurukullā is also three-eyed like Śiva and the Devī while her hairdo, modelled in the shape of flames rising upwards, is a typical iconographic feature of the Cāmuṇḍā-Yoginī matrix in Orissan Tāntric art. Tārā is sometimes depicted in militant attitude as trampling over a pair of crouching figures who, as it is the case with the corpse acting as the *vāhana* of both Kurukullā and Herukā, approximate either to the various *asura*s reportedly killed by Durgā according to the *Devī-Māhātmya* and other Purāṇic works and to the corpse acting as the *vāhana* of terrific Hindu deities such as Cāmuṇḍā and Bhairava, whose respective cults, allied with each other, were much widespread in Orissa during the Bhauma period. Finally, one of the canonical three heads of the Tāntric Buddhist goddess Mārīcī, who expresses the image of the sun, is usually represented by the snout of a pig or of a boar (the distinction between these two animals is not so clear in Orissan art), which is also the most peculiar iconographic feature of the sow-faced Hindu goddess Vārāhī. The cult of Vārāhī gained a great popularity in Orissa during the Bhauma epoch as it is testified by the numerous temples and cult icons that were dedicated to this Śākta-Tāntric goddess in the State.

The Indian archaeologist R.P. Chanda remarked in this context that

> like the Śākta, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava deities, the Mahāyāna Buddhist deities also symbolise the two antagonistic elements, *hiṁsā* (injury of life) and *ahiṁsā* (non-injury), peace and war. But in the Mahāyāna the element of *hiṁsā* (injury of life) is partially softened down by the Buddhist doctrine of *ahiṁsā* (non-injury). Buddha had to fight as hard with Māra and his hosts as Śiva with Andhaka and Durgā with Mahiṣa, Śumbha, Niśumbha and their hosts. But the weapons used by Buddha against his enemy were different from those used by Śiva, Durgā and Viṣṇu against the *asuras*. The Tārās and the divine Bodhisattvas of the Mahāyāna pantheon correspond to the mother goddesses and to the great gods of the Purāṇic (Brāhmaṇic) pantheon. As a

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[109] R.P. Chanda, *art. cit.*, pp. 11-3; N.K. Sahu, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-99; H.C. Das, 'Śakti Cult in Orissa', in M.N. Das, ed., *Sidelights on History and Culture of Orissa*, pp. 353-4; H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', pp. 99-103; K.S. Behera, 'The Buddhist Art and Architecture of Orissa', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, pp. 88-91.

> mark of genetic connection of the Mahāyāna deities with the Brāhmaṇic, the former retain the weapons of warfare and often show the fighting archer's attitude.[110]

Some scholars have tried to show how the concept about Tārā was borrowed by the Mahāyāna Buddhists from the pristine Brāhmaṇical concept about the Mahādevī. Moreover, whatever may have been the original place of worship of the Buddhist Tārā (central India? western Deccan? north-eastern India?), the latter deity also appears to have paid a great tribute to the goddesses anciently venerated the non-Āryan peoples of the Indian sub-continent, as it is the case with the Mahādevī of the Hindus.[111] An analogous consideration seems to hold good also as regards several other goddesses of the Vajrayāna pantheon that gained ascendancy in Orissa under the Bhauma rule.

CULT SYNCRETICISM IN THE BHAUMA EPOCH

The religious policy pursued by the Bhauma-kara kings and queens in the course of their two-century period of rule over Orissa was aimed at conciliating Tāntric Buddhism, the dynasty's original faith, with Śāktism and Śaivism, the dominant faiths among the Oriyās at the time when the Bhaumas became the sovereigns of the country.

As regards Vaiṣṇavism, which was the creed professed by some of the members of the dynasty (for instance, the queen Tribhuvana Mahādevī I, whose reign began in AD 846),[112] there was perhaps an attempt to involve that creed too in this eclectic religious policy. Vaiṣṇavism, however, was never a popular form of religion among the Oriyās prior to the advent of the Imperial Gaṅga dynasty (early twelfth century AD), even though, in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, it had gained some ascendancy in the kingdoms of the Māṭharas and the Nalas, both situated in southern Orissa, and in the ones of the Early Somavaṁśīs and the Śarabhapuriyās, both situated in north-western Orissa.[113] The fact is that Vaiṣṇavism, either in Orissa and in the all-India context, failed to embrace within its fold all the tribal elements associated with Śakti cult which Śaivism, on the contrary, could do on account of its popular character. In a land still deeply influenced by a female-oriented religious tradition, such as Orissa was in the early medieval period, such a failure left very few chances of expansion to Vaiṣṇavism until the rise of Jagannātha cult, imbued with a congeries of tribal and Tāntric elements, opened a new era in the relations between the Vaisṇavas and the Oriyā folk masses.

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[110] R.P. Chanda, *art. cit.*, p. 19.

[111] K.K. Dasgupta, *art. cit.*, pp. 126-7.

[112] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

[113] H. von Stietencron, 'The Advent of Vishnuism in Orissa', in A. Eschmann, H. Kulke and G.C. Tripathy, eds., *The Cult of Jagannātha and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 5-16.

The Bhaumas introduced for the first time, and on a mass scale, a wide gamut of Tāntric cultic features into Orissan Śaivism; at the same time, they reinforced the alliance between Śaivism and Śāktism, which, as stated in the previous section, was already operating in South Orissa during the Śailodbhava period.

It appears clear from a study of the extant temples of the Bhauma-kara epoch located at Bhubaneswar that Pāśupata Śaivism, Somasiddhānta Śaivism (the ancient name of the Kāpālika doctrine), *vāmācāra* Śāktism and Vajrayāna Buddhism became inseparably mixed up and formed a strange amalgam at that stage of Orissan history. In the early medieval period, however, such a mixed form of religion was not peculiar to Orissa alone, but also to many other areas of India.[114] The co-operation and the interaction between the various Buddhist and Hindu sects were made easier by the common Tāntric substratum which underlay the two religious systems. At any rate, so far as Orissa is concerned, contrasts between the Buddhists and the Hindus must have been frequent in that historical period, if it is true, as D. Mitra states,[115] that the representation of some figures of a Buddha on the stone *yūpa* (sacrificial pillar) facing the Vaitāl Deul at Bhubaneswar (eighth century AD) was meant to show the animosity of the Pāśupata-Kāpālikas towards Buddhism.

The Vaitāl Deul, (*Pl.* XXIV and *fig.* 50) which was most likely a centre of the Kāpālika sect at which Cāmuṇḍā was regarded as the female aspect of the Supreme Godhead, is the earliest surviving Śākta shrine in Bhubaneswar. None of the extant temples having been erected in that town prior to it has a Śākta cult icon as its presiding deity. Its sacred imagery and decorative programme, as in the case of the roughly coeval Śiśireśvara temple (a Śaivite shrine lying within the same compound), bear a strong Tāntric Buddhist influence, which fact led some scholars to conclude that both these temples were the creation of the same architects and artists who were also employed by the Bhauma monarchs to erect the Buddhist monasteries on the Assia Hills.[116] The Tāntric Buddhist images of Amoghasiddhi, of a female deity holding a lily in the right hand, of a boar-headed male deity, etc., are found in the Vaitāl Deul along with the Śaiva images of Lakulīśa, Vīrabhadra, Bhairava, Gajāsura-saṁhāra-mūrti, as well as with composite icons such as Hara-Pārvatī, Ardhanārīśvara, Harihara. The presiding deity of the temple, as already indicated, is goddess Cāmuṇḍā, accompanied within the sanctum by the images of other seven *mātṛkās*, while the *pārśva-devatās*, all belonging to the female principle, are there represented by the figures of Pārvatī, Mahiṣamardinī and Ardhanārīśvara. The latter deity (*fig.* 40) is flanked on each side by a pair of exquisitely carved *alasa-kanyās* (indolent damsels) and is, moreover, distinguished by a markedly feminine look (which fact shows that the builders of the temple had a preference for the left, i.e., the Śākta side of the Divine Androgyne).[117]

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[114] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 317-8.

[115] D. Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[116] K.C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, Calcutta, 1961, pp. 40-1; C.L. Fabri, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-7.

In the early Bhauma-kara period Śakti cult at Bhubaneswar was, therefore, neither independent from Śaivism nor from Mahāyāna Buddhism. Barring the initial Buddhist influence, that soon vanished owing to the conversion of the Bhauma-kara monarchs to Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, a close association between the Śākta and Śaiva sacred imagery is, furthermore, noticed in two other shrines located on the bank of the vast Bindusāgara tank at Bhubaneswar, namely, the temples of Mohinī and of Uttareśvara, which are generally assigned to the earlier part of the Bhauma rule.[118] The former, although it enshrines a terrific image of Cāmuṇḍā as its presiding deity, has as its *pārśva-devatās* the images of Pārvatī, Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa, which are the side deities of most of Orissan Śaiva temples,[119] while the latter, consecrated to Śiva, contains in its sanctum a *yoni-paṭṭa* without *liṅga*, which is guarded by the images of Cāmuṇḍā and Bhairava placed respectively on the left and right inner walls of the *jagamohana*. Two other shrines lying on the bank of the Bindusāgara tank, that of Dvāravāsinī and that of Akṣaracaṇḍī (a miniature one), are presided over by images of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā dating from the earlier part of the Bhauma period.[120] The two images of Cāmuṇḍā and the two of Mahiṣamardinī at issue must be most likely taken to represent the 'four images of Caṇḍikā' which, according to the *Svarṇādri-mahodaya* (a late medieval Sanskrit text dealing with the legendary history of the main temples of Bhubaneswar) were installed on the four sides of the Bindusāgara tank in the initial period of the Bhauma domination over the great temple town (*ca.* eighth century AD).[121] Along with the Vaitāl Deul, the four described shrines are the earliest extant ones presided over by a female deity to be found in Bhubaneswar. The circumstance that all of these temples contain some terrific or fierce manifestations of the Devī indicates that the first form of full-fledged Brāhmaṇical Śāktism that made its appearance at Bhubaneswar was the *vāmācāra* (left-hand) one, connected in all probability with the occult sanguinary rites typical of the Kāpālika sect. The practice of human sacrifice, which during the Bhauma epoch was most likely in vogue at the Vaitāl Deul, was, as it seems, shared by the Kāpālikas of Bhubaneswar with certain groups of Buddhists worshipping the malevolent aspect of the Śakti, who fostered a very violent form of Tantrism oriented to black-magic.

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[117] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-81 and 232.

[118] *Ibid.*, pp. 154-6. Some other scholars, however, assign the temples in question to the early eighth century AD, the period of decline of the Śailodbhavas: see T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[119] On this ground, some scholars question that Mohinī temple was originally a Śākta shrine: see V. Dehejia, *Early Stone Temples of Orissa*, New Delhi (etc.), 1979, p. 90.

[120] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[121] *Ibid.*, pp. 21-4 and 232-3.

As regards the ancient temple town of Virajā, also known as Guheśvarapatākā or Yajñapura (modern Jajpur), which was the capital of the Bhauma-kara kingdom, the existence of temples similar to the Vaitāl-Śiśireśvara group of Bhubaneswar is attested there by a great number of fragmentary pieces of sculpture dating from the Bhauma epoch, which indicate the close correlation of the art style that flourished at both those centres and the belonging of the sculptors of both places to one and the same art tradition. Of course, also the remains of the Śaiva temples built at Jajpur during the Bhauma epoch bear a marked Tāntric influence.[122]

The influence of Tāntric Buddhism upon Brāhmaṇical Hinduism was probably more strongly felt at Jajpur, the centre of power of the Bhauma-kara kings, than at Bhubaneswar. The Bhauma monarchs made Virajā *kṣetra* a culture and pilgrimage centre for the Mahāyāna Buddhists, Śaivas, Śāktas and Jainas altogether, but of course, in the initial part of their rule, it must have been Tāntric Buddhism that played a pre-eminent role there.[123] Jajpur, indeed, was surrounded in those days by Tāntric Buddhist centres (Khadipada, Solanapura, the not distant monasteries on the Assia Hills, etc.), and was itself a centre of Tāntric Buddhism. Accordingly, in the Bhauma period the rituals of the shrine of goddess Virajā at Jajpur, representing the oldest and most eminent Śākta *pīṭha* of Orissa, appear to have been once again influenced by Buddhism (this time, in its Vajrayānic form) only a few centuries after the *pīṭha* had been 'depurated' from its Buddhist features by the unknown Hindu kings who were ruling over Oḍra during the Gupta age.[124]

The rituals of the shrine of Virajā seem, thus, to have undergone a great change in the Bhauma epoch, when they were connected with Tāntric practices of the mixed, Buddhist-Śaiva-Śākta matrix discussed above. The ritualistic pattern being presently observed at Virajā temple on the occasion of the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā* is described as an amalgamation of different traditions belonging to the tribal, Buddhist, Vedic and Brāhmaṇical Hindu religions respectively.[125]

Moreover, it seems that certain horrific images of Cāmuṇḍā dating from the Bhauma epoch,[126] which are presently found within the premises of some later Hindu temples of Jajpur, were acting in that period as the common objects of worship of the Śāktas, Śaivas and

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[122] K.C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa*, pp. 318 and 438.

[123] S.N. Rajaguru, 'A Historical Account of Viraja Kshetra from Inscriptions', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vols. XXIV, XXV and XXVI, pp. 193-8.

[124] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 330-1.

[125] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, p. 10.

[126] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

Vajrayāna Buddhists,[127] who most likely adored this dreadful goddess in Tāntric rites for gaining her favours and attaining perfection. Cāmuṇḍā, a Hindu deity, was probably worshipped by the Tāntric Buddhist practitioners of Jajpur in connection with *abhicāra* rites (i.e., rites that employed *vāmācāra-mantras* for a malevolent purpose).[128] Cāmuṇḍā is still today a very important deity for the Śāktas of Jajpur: she is, in fact, invoked and offered a sacrificial goat at the shrine of Virajā (in the Bhauma epoch dominated by Tāntric Buddhism) on the night of *Mahāṣṭamī* during the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā*.[129] It appears clear that, in the Bhauma period, Cāmuṇḍā was regarded as one of the most feared and revered manifestations of Śakti or divine energy by the Oriyās of all castes and creed. It may be added to this, that in the early medieval period the Śākta-Tāntric cult of Cāmuṇḍā represented, in the eyes of the Oriyā Hindus, a complex of religious ideals and practices analogous to the one which, in other parts of India, was represented by the cult of Kālī (of whom Cāmuṇḍā, on the other hand, is nothing but the crone form). As it will be shown in chapter 4, a Śākta-Tāntric cult pivoted upon the veneration of Kālī comparable with the one that historically developed in Bengal made its appearance in Orissa only during the later medieval period.

The worship of Cāmuṇḍā, associated with that of Śiva-Bhairava in conformity with the religious perspective of the Kāpālikas, was widespread over the coastal strip and the north-eastern hill tracts of Orissa all through the term of the Bhauma epoch. Besides prevailing at Bhubaneswar and Jajpur, this was one of the dominant forms of cult at Khiching (the then capital city of the Bhañja rulers of Mayurbhanj under the name of Khijjiṅga-koṭṭa) as well as in the region stretching from Khiching to the Bay of Bengal, as it is shown by the shrines, dating back to the tenth-eleventh centuries AD or, in a few cases, to a still earlier period, that were dedicated to this terrific form of the Devī at Pedagadi, Kishorpur, Avana, Bhimpur, Deogan and Badasahi. The last site was once famous for the practice of human sacrifice,[130] which, in the Bhauma period, also formed an essential element of the Kāpālika ritual at the Vaitāl Deul of Bhubaneswar.[131]

In the course of the Bhauma-kara period the worship of Cāmuṇḍā appears to have spread also over the valley of the river Prachi, stretching along the boundary line between the modern districts of Puri and Cuttack. This is still nowadays a most sacred area rich in Hindu *tīrthas* (places of pilgrimage situated on water-courses) and imbued with Tāntric religiousness.

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[127] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

[128] T. Mishra, *art. cit.*, p. 143.

[129] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, p. 5.

[130] N.N. Vasu, *The Archaeological Survey of Mayūrbhañja*, Delhi, reprint 1981, pp. LXIX and LXXV-LXXVI; T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, pp. 343 and 345-6.

[131] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

A large number of Cāmuṇḍā cult icons bearing different iconographic features are still today worshipped by the villagers inhabiting that valley under various popular names, some among which, such as Jāgulei, are clearly connected with Tāntric Buddhism (Jāṅgulī, whose name was corrupted into Jāgulei by the Oriyās, was the Mahāyāna Buddhist serpent-goddess who protected her worshippers from snake-bite), and may, therefore, be reminiscent of the mixed form of religion that prevailed in Orissa during the Bhauma epoch.

Also a large number of Mahiṣamardinī images, from the four-handed to twelve-handed variety, are to be found in the Prachi Valley as well as in the entire Mahanadi delta region. After an initial prevalence of the eight-armed variety of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, the Bhauma epoch witnessed the emergence in Orissa of the worship of the ten-armed form of this goddess, generally called Bhagavatī by the Oriyās. This deity was usually adored with Tāntric rites, often in association with Cāmuṇḍā (who, in the *Devī-Māhātmya*, is said to have come forth from Ambikā/Durgā's forehead to destroy the *asura*s Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa).[132]

The mixed form of religion characteristic of the early Bhauma-kara period was deprived of its Tāntric Buddhist element in around the beginning of the ninth century AD, when the Bhaumas repudiated Mahāyāna Buddhism to embrace Brāhmaṇical Hinduism. From that time onwards, Orissa's peculiar form of Buddhism tended to merge into Hinduism, soon ceasing to be Buddhism at all. In spite of this, Tāntric Buddhism definitively disappeared from Orissa only in the course of the twelfth century AD, after having fashioned for centuries the religious sentiment of the Oriyās and having given a new shape to the regional Tāntric art movement.[133] At any rate, the mixed form of religion typical of the Bhauma period, even after its 'depuration' from the Tāntric Buddhist element, continued to fashion with its unmistakable Tāntric sign the cult images and the overall decorative programmes of many of the Śaiva and Śākta temples erected up to the tenth century AD not only by the Bhauma-karas, but also by their neighbouring rulers, namely, the Somavaṁśīs of Dakṣiṇa Kośala, the Early Gaṅgas of Kaliṅganagara, the Bhañjas of Khijjiṅga-koṭṭa, etc.

Moreover, two new varieties of temple architecture, i.e., the barrel-vaulted and rectangular-planned *khākharā* type, influenced by the architecture of the Buddhist *caitya* hall and meant specifically for the Śākta-Tāntric goddesses (particularly for the *mātṛkās*, whether worshipped in a group or in individual form such as Vārāhī and Cāmuṇḍā), and later on the circular hypaethral type destined to Yoginī cult, made their appearance in Orissa during the first part of the Bhauma-kara period and soon spread beyond the borders of the Bhauma kingdom, as is shown by the existence of a temple of Sixty-Four Yoginīs and a

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132. *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts of Orissa,* vol. V: Tantra Manuscripts, compiled by M.P. Dash, Bhubaneswar, 1965, pp. XXXVIII-XLIV; P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report 1974-75: Prachi Valley*, Bhubaneswar, 1975, pp. 1-3.

133. K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 311-2; H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', pp. 98 and 103.

series of *khākharā* shrines at Ranipur-Jharial in Balangir district (a magnificent Śaiva temple complex erected by the Somavaṁśīs of Dakṣiṇa Kośala in the ninth-tenth centuries AD) and of some *khākharā* shrines in the compound of Madhukeśvara temple at Mukhalingam (Srikakulam district of northern Andhra Pradesh) and in that of Pātāleśvara temple at Paikapada (Koraput district), both built by the Eastern Gaṅga kings in around the ninth century AD and containing a set of Saptamātṛkās each. Thus, the Cāmuṇḍā-Mātṛkā-Yoginī cultic complex spread beyond the limits of the Bhauma kingdom, within which it had been patterned into its mature artistic form, and became a strong distinctive element of Śakti cult allied with Śaivism also in the neighbouring areas (the modern Srikakulam, Koraput, Balangir and Mayurbhanj districts).

In the same period (*ca.* eighth-tenth centuries AD) the image of Mahiṣamardinī, which since the beginning of the Bhauma rule had replaced that of Pārvatī as the *pārśva-devatā* (side deity) installed in the north niche of the standard Śaiva temple of coastal Orissa,[134] was as a norm installed in the same position also in most of the Śaiva shrines lying within the dominions of the Somavaṁśīs, the Eastern Gaṅgas and the Bhañjas of Khijjiṅga-koṭṭa, with this showing that, by that time, Śāktism had firmly allied itself with Śaivism throughout the cultural area termed as Kaliṅga.

The process of Sanskritisation of tribal goddess-cults was carried on during the Bhauma period with special stress on pillar-goddesses. Stambheśvarī, the Goddess-of-the-Post, became in the course of this period a very important deity in the semi-tribal feudal principalities ruled over by the Bhañjas of Khiñjali *maṇḍala* (Baudh-Phulbani-Sonepur-Ghumsar region) and the Tuṅgas of Yamagarta *maṇḍala* (Angul region), as is suggested by the copper-plate grants issued by those two dynasties.[135] At the same time, the worship of Stambheśvarī spread over the coastal plains of central Orissa as well: the presiding deities of Bhuāsuṇī temple at Bhubaneswar and Piṅgalākṣī temple at Denua near Nimapara are, in fact, two different forms of this goddess. The very image of goddess Subhadrā, forming the middle member of the Jagannātha Trinity of Puri, is believed by some scholars to have originated out of the pillar-goddess concept in the course of the Bhauma period along with the images of Lord Jagannātha and Balabhadra.[136]

To conclude this sketch of religious syncreticism in early medieval Orissa it can be mentioned that a number of Śākta or allied Śaiva-Śākta folk festivals and *yātrā*s (temple festivals), related to the Tantra culture, originated in the country during the Bhauma-kara period and the subsequent Somavaṁśī period as a consequence of the Āryanisation of tribal cults. Such festivals, forming as a whole a ritualistic synthesis of tribal and Hindu religious traditions, are discussed in detail in the last chapter of the present work.

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[134] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, Leiden (etc.), 1987, pp. 1061-2.

[135] K.S. Behera, 'The Evolution of Śakti Cult at Jajpur, Bhubaneswar and Puri', p. 74.

[136] K.C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-5 and 39.

BRĀHMAṆICAL TĀNTRIC ART IN THE BHAUMA EPOCH

It was especially in the field of iconography that the Śākta-Tāntric trends introduced by the Bhauma-karas met with the ancient tribal cultures of Orissa. In addition to the development of the iconographic representation of the Tāntric Buddhist goddesses mentioned above, the Bhauma-kara epoch witnessed the magnificent flowering of Brāhmaṇical-Tāntric art, particularly in so far as the depiction of different manifestations of Śakti is concerned.

The Tāntric images of Hindu goddesses satisfied in the best way the low-caste people's propensity for wanting to 'see' the divine, or better, to establish a reciprocal eye contact (*darśana*) between the Mahādevī and her votaries. Narrative of the great Goddess' activity, provided literarily in the *Devī-Māhātmya* and other Purāṇic texts, become visualised in the early medieval Śākta-Tāntric iconography in order to let the worshippers know the multiform manifestations of that deity. At the same time, the goddess images were believed to 'see' her votaries, with this enabling them to better submit their requests for beneficence, supplications and implorations to the goddess herself.

At a higher grade of consciousness, the initiated *sādhaka* could understand the esoteric meaning of a Śākta-Tāntric image by realising the latter's identity with the specific divine power (*śakti*) by it represented, which, at one time, was thought to be already inherent in the *sādhaka*'s soul. As an artist was able to create the image of a Tāntric deity by means of his inward yogic vision, so the initiate to Tantra could 'awaken' his own elect deity by means of the double process of transfiguration and self-identification stimulated by the *dhyāna* (yogic meditation) employed to worship that particular deity. The specific *mantra*s and *yantra*s associated with a deity were considered equally essential as to the ritual 'awakening' of the power contained in a Tāntric cult image.[137]

The Śākta-Tāntric art of Orissa, from the Bhauma period onwards, aimed at leading the devotee to realise the consciousness of the transcendental reality in its multiform aspects, corresponding to the different forms of the universal Śakti. Art forms, thus, became more complicated and more attention was paid in carving out the sacred images with identifying details (weapons, attributes, mounts, number of arms, etc.) in accordance with the iconographic canons prescribed in the Purāṇas, Āgamas and Tantras, which corresponded to specific spiritual powers and qualities embodied by the deities. This, however, was not a specific trend of Orissan Śāktism, rather it was a general trend of Tāntric art, both Hindu and Buddhist, in the all-India context.

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[137] J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

The spread of Śākta-Tantrism over Orissa in the Bhauma period caused the introduction into the regional Hindu pantheon of a series of new female deities with iconographic features of their own, such as Maṅgalā, Manasā, Vimalā, Sixty-Four Yoginīs, etc., as well as a general refashionment, more in line with the new Tāntric trends, of the Śākta images conceived by the Oriyā artists of the earlier period, such as Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, Siṁhavāhinī Durgā, Pārvatī, Cāmuṇḍā, Vārāhī and the other *mātṛkās*, etc. The respective iconographies of these Hindu goddesses will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

If compared with the early art style of the Kaliṅga country, often characterised by modesty and naïvety and devoid of both elegance and movement, the Brāhmaṇical-Tāntric art of the Bhauma-kara epoch shows

> An advance in technique, depth of relief and considerable maturity in plastic sensitivity and naturalness. . . . The dignified self-composed figures of the deities with the expression of absorption are mellowed with a warmth of spiritual grace and are elegant and refined.[138]

The indigenous features inherent in Orissan sculptural art, continued from the post-Aśokan age to the early Bhauma period, were gradually replaced in the later Bhauma period by a new mode of depicting divine and secular figures. The squattish bodies, heavy breasts, large hips and thighs, round faces, flat noses and indigenous ornaments characterising the early phases of Orissan sculptural art gave, thus, way to a new style marked for elongated and proportioned bodies, sharp and angular faces, rich and sophisticated ornaments, etc.[139] This notwithstanding, some among the most charming and elegant specimens of Orissan Brāhmaṇical-Tāntric art of the Bhauma period, such as the *alasa-kanyās* of Vaitāl Deul (eighth century AD) and the *yoginīs* of Hirapur (ninth century AD), continued to bear the characteristics of the physiognomy, anatomy and body ornamentation of the aboriginal women of the land (short stature, broad hips and ankles, fleshy lips, half-nakedness, tribal-like earrings and coiffures, etc.). The sculptors of the Bhauma period certainly drew their inspiration, at least in part, from the racial features and material cultures prevailing among the tribal and semi-tribal communities of Orissa. By virtue of this device, the members of those communities were likely to be increasingly attracted by the Sanskritised Śākta-Tāntric deities, in whose carved images the natural grace and beauty of the indigenous women of the land were reflected. This was, no doubt, a fairly intelligent way to gain new devotees to the Brāhmaṇical religion. In fact, the said new features of Orissan sculptural art were introduced only after Brāhmaṇical Hinduism had become the dominant faith in the Bhauma kingdom, supplanting Buddhism.

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[138] D. Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

[139] B.K. Rath, *art. cit.*, pp. 114-16.

As in the case of the iconography of Śiva, characterised by the polarity of his *saumya* (propitious) and *raudra* (unpropitious) aspects, so also the iconography of the Devī, from this stage of Orissan history onwards, lays stress on the two-fold, creative and destructive aspect of the divine in accordance with the different manifestations of the Devī herself. Some of the forms of the great Goddess carved by the sculptors of the Bhauma period bear on their faces an expression of active benevolence intermingled with the spirit of passive contemplation and display with their hands benevolent *mudrās* (hand postures and gestures with specific religious significance), in a similar way to the Tāntric Buddhist sculptures — especially those depicting goddess Tārā — belonging to the same art school. Such a mode of depiction of the great goddess as a benevolent 'Mother' (Pārvatī, Maṅgalā, etc.) who is, at the same time, regarded as the supreme mistress of *yoga*, is seemingly connected with the diffusion of the *bhakti* movement, according to which the worshipper's devotion is directed to a deity ready to bestow both boons and protection on him.[140] In spite of this, also the equally revered awe-inspiring forms of the Mahādevī, such as the repulsive and hideous Cāmuṇḍā or the warlike and fierce Mahiṣamardinī, were venerated in those days as 'Mothers', even though their votaries can hardly have experienced sentiments of joy, confidence or abandonment in contemplating their cult icons. This apparent paradox is part of the mystery of the Goddess, the hypostasis of *prakṛti* (primordial nature), in whose bosom there is cohabitation of creative and destructive forces originating from the interaction of the *guṇas* (the three fundamental metaphysical qualities that, according to the Sāṁkhya doctrines, determine the nature of all what exists in the manifest universe).

TĀNTRIC RELIGIOUSNESS IN THE BHAUMA EPOCH

Laying for now aside the detailed discussion on the Śākta-Tāntric iconography in medieval Orissa, which forms the argument of the fourth chapter of this work, it is important here to see how the Tāntric religious trends fostered by the Bhauma-karas interacted with the ancestral devotional practices followed by the Oriyās and vice versa. For this purpose, it appears unimportant to ascertain whether the Tāntric religiousness characterising the Bhauma epoch in Orissa was more connected with the Buddhist faith than with the Hindu one, for Tantrism can be considered 'a religious undercurrent, originally independent of any abstruse metaphysical speculation, flowing from an obscure point of time in the religious history of India',[141] and as such, it seems more connected with the archaic female-oriented religions of the non-Āryan peoples than with any definite faith subsequently superimposed by the Āryan rulers over the pre-Vedic religious substratum.

Some Buddhist inscriptions of Orissa dating back to the Bhauma-kara period attest that

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[140] R.P. Chanda, *art. cit.*, p. 20.

[141] S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults as Background of Bengali Literature*, Calcutta, 1946, p. 27.

maṇḍalas (sacred diagrams, generally circular in shape, drawn on an altar with coloured powders), *mantras* (sacred verbal utterances) and *japas* (oral or mental repetitions, over and over again, of a *mantra* before one's own elect deity) were widely used by the Oriyās of that time. Such devotional practices were favoured either by the Buddhist members of the Bhauma royal family and by their later Hindu successors, who never ceased to believe in the efficacy of Tāntric rites.[142] In regard to their impact on the common people, these Tāntric practices, at that stage of the Sanskritisation process, may have represented the liaison with the tribal religio-cultural heritage of Orissa, irrespective of whether a folk community had previously embraced Mahāyāna Buddhism or, alternatively, Brāhmaṇical Hinduism.

The Tāntric concept about the *maṇḍala* appears to be closely connected with the worship of *mātṛkās* and that of *yoginīs*, which during the Bhauma epoch gained an increasing popularity in Orissa. As stated by the astronomer Varāhamihira in his *Bṛhatsaṁhitā* (sixth century AD), the *mātṛkās* (Divine Mothers) had to be worshipped in the *mātṛ-maṇḍala* (Circle-of-Mothers), which could be drawn by well-versed Śākta-Tāntric adepts only. Such mystic-magical circle, upon which the images of the *mātṛkās* were to be subsequently installed, is likely to represent the most traditional orthodox mode of Śakti-worship known in the Gupta age, for no Śākta goddess other than the Divine Mothers is mentioned in the section of Varāhamihira's work dealing with the consecration of the images of Hindu divinities.[143]

The cult of Saptamātṛkās, whose origins are still obscure, will be discussed in detail in chapter 4; for the present, suffice here to say that the Gangadhar stone inscription of Viśvavarman (western India, AD 423) clearly speaks of a temple of the Divine Mothers as a terrible abode of corpse-devouring female demons (*ḍākinīs*), the presiding deity of which is represented by an over-excited band of goddesses whose tremendous power is fed on magic rites performed in accordance with the Tantras.[144] The worship of the Divine Mothers in a circle or *maṇḍala* was perhaps one, if not the most important, of such magic rites sanctioned by the Tāntric tradition, which, in its turn, had been deeply influenced in its formative stages by the female-dominated magic rites originated outside the pale of the Vedic tradition.

The beautiful cuspidated ceiling of the *jagamohana* of Mukteśvara temple at Bhubaneswar, erected during the period of transition from the Bhauma art phase to the Somavaṁśī one (*ca.* AD 950), is a later evidence of the cultic association, having probably established in Orissan Tantrism in earlier times, between Mātṛkā-worship allied with Śaivism and the use of *maṇḍala* as an aid to spiritual practice. The figures of Saptamātṛkās with Vīrabhadra, each of them occupying a petal-niche of the lotus-shaped medallion carved at the centre of the ceiling in question and flanked on either side by the images of Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya, have here a deep esoteric meaning. The lotus medallion can be assimilated to a Vāstupuruṣa *maṇḍala* (the sacred diagram representing the Lord-of-the-Building-Site), embracing the manifest universe and the extent of its directions, and the central circle of eight divinities bears a symbolism similar to that of the eight *dikpāla*s (Regents-of-the-Directions). The Divine Mothers themselves are described in the *Mahābhārata* as planetary powers (*graha*s) or also as the 'Great Mothers of the Universe', a designation that bestows an astral-cosmic dimension on them. The abstract symbol of the Absolute carved at the centre of the lotus medallion — a crescent moon (Śiva) placed on a full-blown lotus (Pārvatī) — may symbolise the transcendental union of the male and female principles. For all these reasons, W. Smith states that the Circle of Mothers carved on the Mukteśvara ceiling resembles, both formally and conceptually, the Hindu and Buddhist *maṇḍala*s of the medieval period.[145]

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[142] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

[143] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 230; D.C. Sircar, 'Śakti Cult in Western India', in Id., ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 88-9.

[144] *Ibid.*, pp. 90-1.

Yoginī temples are circular in shape, just like the Circle of Mothers, so that they can be similarly taken to represent, among other things, the unending, harmonic and symmetric principle of the *maṇḍala*. The Yoginī temple with Śiva-Bhairava or Naṭarāja as its central figure and *yoginī*s as the multiform projections of Śakti in a *maṇḍala* or esoteric diagram furthermore recalls conceptually the Śiva-*liṅga* inserted in the circular *yoni-paṭṭa*.[146] Actually, the groundplan of Sixty-Four Yoginī temple at Hirapur (Puri district) is exactly shaped as a *yoni* with its spout-like projection. The geometrical figure of the circle, representing the realm of perfection beyond material contingencies, recalls the shape of the womb and is, therefore, considered a primordial symbol of the female principle too. The sacred pots being worshipped in many areas of India, Orissa included, on the occasion of the so-called *Kalaśa-Pūjā* (Tāntric adoration of the goddess in the form of an earthen pot, which in Orissa takes place in the month of Caitra) are in most cases spherical in shape like a womb. As it is well known, the earthen pot is a symbol of fertility and increase to the Indian tribesmen too.

The *maṇḍala* symbolism characterising Yoginī temples has been explained by the scholars in different ways, laying alternatively stress on its connections with the *Vāstupuruṣa* scheme of space subdivision in the temple layout,[147] with the *ahorātra* (the ever recurring cycle of days and nights, i.e., the revolution of time),[148] with the solar quadrant (in this case, the central Bhairava figure may be identified with the Tāntric sun god Mārtaṇḍa-Bhairava),[149] with the *śrīcakra-yantra* of later Tantrism (representing in visual form Parāśakti or primeval transcendental consciousness),[150] with the primitive circular rails erected round sacred trees for the worship of *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs*,[151] and even with the circular groundplan of Buddhist *stūpas*.[152] Whatever may be the case here, some old Indian legends firmly state that *yoginīs* roam about in a group in the sky and, when they descend down, they invariably form a circle.[153]

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[145] W. Smith, *The Mukteśvara Temple in Bhubaneswar*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 89-92.

[146] H.C. Das, *Tāntricism: A Study of the Yoginī Cult*, pp. 19-20.

[147] K.V. Soundara Rajan, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-2.

[148] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *Śilpa Prakāśa: Medieval Orissan Sanskrit Text on Temple Architecture by Rāmacandra Kaulācāra*, Leiden, 1966, pp. XXXIV and 133 n.

[149] M.T. De Mallmann, *Les enseignements iconographiques de l'Agni Purāṇa*, Paris, 1963, pp. 7-8 and 175-7.

On the background of the age-old symbolic relation between the great Goddess and the circle stands the identification, propounded by Sir J. Marshall and by R.N. Banerjea,[154] of the archaic ring-stones and stone disks recovered by the archaeologists from different areas of India as cult objects representing the female sexual organ and, therefore, the female principle itself. Such circular or perforated stone objects of the Neolithic period, some of which, as it is reported, were also found in north-western Orissa,[155] are taken by the said scholars as the probable archetypes of the *yantras* (mystic diagrams formed by triangles and straight lines crossing one another) and the *cakras* (sacred circular figures consisting of angles and petal-like parts) of Tantrism, as well as, one might add here, of the Hindu and Buddhist *maṇḍalas*.

The *yantra-cakra-maṇḍala* abstraction, indubitably based on a magico-mystic transfiguration of the Tāntric idea that the union of the male and female principles presides over the entire cosmic manifestation, seemingly played a fundamental role also in the consecration of the Śākta shrines during the Tāntric phase of the religious history of Orissa, roughly coinciding with the Bhauma and Somavaṁśī periods (eighth-eleventh centuries AD). This may be evinced by the *Śilpa-Prakāśa*, a Tāntric *śilpa-śāstra* (treatise of architecture) of Orissa probably based on an earlier Āgamic text and tentatively assigned by its editors, A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, to about the twelfth century AD,[156] though the Orissan historians are generally inclined to consider it an apocryphal work.[157] According to this text, the Yoginī *yantra*, rectangular in shape, had always to be drawn and worshipped by brāhmaṇas, in the presence of the patron who built the shrine, inside the foundations of a *khākharā* temple (meant specifically for the Śākta deities) on a rectangular field in the exact position and dimensions of the temple sanctum. This sacred norm, perhaps actually followed in the Bhauma and Somavaṁśī epochs at the time of erection of a *khākharā* shrine, conveys a symbolism conceptually akin to that of the Vāstupuruṣa *maṇḍala*, with this possibly indicating that the *yantra* consecrated to the *yoginīs* — which represents the three *guṇas*, the fundamental tendencies of *prakṛti* — had for the Śāktas of early medieval Orissa and for their royal protectors a function analogous to the one attributed by the followers of other Hindu sectarian creed (Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism) to the *maṇḍala* consecrated to Vāstupuruṣa, the Lord-of-the-Building-Site.[158] The practice, very common in southern India during the medieval period, of burying under the *pīṭha* of a goddess a plate, on which a *śrīcakra-yantra* was engraved,[159] must have had a similar meaning.

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[150] V.W. Karambelkar, 'Matsyendranātha and His Yoginī Cult', *India Historical Quarterly*, vol. XXXI (1955), No. 4, p. 377.

[151] R.M. Cimino, 'Le Yoginī ed i loro luoghi di culto', *Rivista degli studi orientali, Roma*, vol. LV (1981), pp. 50-1.

[152] C.L. Fabri, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-9.

[153] V.W. Karambelkar, *art. cit.*, p. 373.

[154] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-73.

[155] J.P. Singhdeo, 'Erotic Art on Temple Architecture', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXII, Nos. 1 and 2, pp. 7-9.

[156] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. XVII-XXI.

[157] Orally from Prof. K.S. Behera.

The Tāntric ritual custom, followed as a tradition by the *sthāpatis* (architects) of Orissa, of laying down and consecrating *yantras* under the erotic sculptures and the images of deities carved on a temple — in the latter case, the compositional *yantra* is called *pañjara* (network, frame) — is also mentioned in the *Śilpa-Prakāśa* of Orissa. Such compositional *yantras*, not mentioned in any other *śilpa-śāstra*, were conceived as geometrical transfigurations of a spiritual reality manifesting itself in numberless forms (the deities and the ritual activities meant to imitate them), namely, as 'the intermediaries, the bridge between the world of ideas and the world of forms'.[160]

The *maṇḍala-yantra-cakra* symbolism is found in Orissa in a still different context at the Śiva temples of Baudh (Phulbani district), erected by the Somavaṁśī monarchs in around the tenth century AD. These three shrines, star-shaped in plan, contain *liṅgas* placed on *yoni-paṭṭas* that are similarly star-shaped. While discussing these very peculiar temples, K.C. Panigrahi remarks that 'these shapes indicate that both the temples and deities were made in the form of *maṇḍalas* or mystic figures, with the help of which the *tāntrikas* wanted to attain their *siddhis*'.[161]

To sum up, it may be inferred that the diffusion of a worship pattern based on *maṇḍala* in Orissa, which is attested by the above-mentioned Buddhist inscriptions of the Bhaumakara period, was probably part of a wider complex of Tāntric ideas and practices pivoted upon the concept about the spatial disposition of the *śaktis* (cosmic energies personified as female deities) into the shape of a circle (the Circle of Mothers, the Circle of Yoginīs, etc.)

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[158] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. XXXI-XXXIV.

[159] T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, I, Madras, 1914, pp. 331-2.

[160] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, p. LV.

[161] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

having the Absolute as its centre. The interrelation of this concept with the Tāntric doctrine of *yantra* and *cakra* is an ascertained fact, whereas the use of Tāntric sacred diagrams at the consecration stage of Śākta temples and cult icons in Orissa during the Bhauma-kara and Somavaṁśī periods, hypothesised by the editors of the *Śilpa-Prakāśa*, appears to go in the same direction.

Another aspect of Tāntric religiousness mentioned in the aforesaid Buddhist inscriptions of the Bhauma epoch, namely, the adoration of the *deva*s with *mantra*s and *japa*s, is equally important as to the comprehension of the evolution of Śākta-Tantrism in Orissa in the course of that period. There appears to be evidence enough that such practices represented a cultic liaison between the Brāhmaṇical doctrine of *sphoṭa-vidyā* (the Knowledge-of-the-Eternal-Sound) and the propitiatory magic rites in vogue from the hoary past among the tribal peoples of India.

In India, sound has been an object of study since ancient times, particularly among the *udgātra* brāhmaṇas, the singers of the Vedic sung hymns called *sāmanas*.[162] These brāhmaṇa communities — some of which, presently practising a form of Śākta-Tantrism, settled along the middle course of the river Mahanadi in an indeterminable period of Orissan history — were attached to the *Atharvaveda* tradition, namely, the Vedic current most influenced by the non-Āryan magico-religious complex.[163] Along with the post-Vedic philosophers of the Mīmāṁsā-*darśana*, these *udgātra* brāhmaṇas elaborated a theory according to which a *mantra* does not draw its effectiveness from its meaning, but rather, from the sounds it is composed of.

*Mantra*s (thought-forms), which are traditionally believed to belong to the original, primeval and eternal language first perceived by Manu, who subsequently taught it to mankind, are in a way identical to the deities they aim at evoking. They represent the power of the deities and are inseparable from the latter. Each of them speaks of a definite divinity, who is praised and pleased by the utterance of its own *mantra*. Through the utterance of a specific *mantra*, a magico-mystic contact can be established between the deity — whose essence, at that particular juncture, becomes incarnated in the *mantra* itself — and its worshipper initiated to the Tantra doctrine. In other words, the verbal powers known as *mantra*s represent the link between the divine and mundane worlds. The metrical characteristics of a particular *mantra* are connected with the linear characteristics of the corresponding *yantra*. *Mantra*s and *yantra*s go side by side in the Tāntric form of worship; through them, knowledge of the occult world, protection from evil influences and freeing from transmigration can be attained.[164]

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[162] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

[163] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. XVII and XX.

[164] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, pp. 334-5; T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-3.

Tantrism just rereads in an esoteric key the Brāhmaṇical speculations about the ritualistic almightiness of well-uttered Vedic formulae, epitomised in the above-mentioned doctrine known as *sphoṭa-vidyā*. According to this doctrine, enunciated in a number of later Upaniṣads, the Revealed Word represents the Inferior *Brahman* in opposition to the Superior *Brahman*, which the former yet enables one to attain. The *Brahman*-Sound (*Śabda-Brahman*), the principle of both speech and the phenomenal world, is the lower form of the Absolute, i.e., of the non-dualistic, undifferentiated *Brahman*. The *mantras* of the Tāntric tradition are nothing but the esoteric and ritualistic translation of the Brāhmaṇical concept of *Śabda-Brahman*. According to the Tāntric doctrine, each formula, each letter, each sound is a symbol of the ultimate reality, evoking this or that form of the Absolute. The Vedic goddess Vāc (Speech), personifying the Revealed Word itself, is identified in Tāntric literature with the great Goddess, the Mahādevī, who is the source of the mystic knowledge of the Supreme *Brahman* (*Brahma-vidyā*).[165]

The Vedic idea of Vāc as the 'Mother' of all *mantras* (in that she is ascribed the birth of the three-fold Veda as her progeny), thus, evolved in the Tāntric context into the idea of Mātṛkā-Śakti or Parā-Vāc (Supreme Logos), the first undifferentiated notion.[166] This non-manifest form of the dynamic power inherent in the godhead (Śakti) becomes manifested in *mantras*, conceived in the Tantras as 'powers in the form of sound'. The subtle forms of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet forming all *mantras* are known as *mantra-mātṛkās* or simply as *mātṛkās*,[167] assimilated in some Tāntric texts to a group of eight goddesses presiding over the eight sections which the Sanskrit alphabet consists of. This Tāntric symbolism of sound may be connected with the figures of the Divine Mothers conceived in the Purāṇic tradition, who are often described as forming a group of eight (Aṣṭamātṛkās). In this connection, an attempt has been made to show how the group of *mātṛkās* depicted on the already mentioned ceiling of Mukteśvara temple at Bhubaneswar may express the union between the *maṇḍala* symbolism and the *mantra* one.[168]

But what appears most remarkable here is that goddess Cāmuṇḍā — who, as clearly demonstrated by the disposition of cult images in the sanctum of the Vaitāl Deul at Bhubaneswar, was regarded in the Bhauma period as the first among the *mātṛkās* — is often found worshipped in Orissa under a name, Carcikā or Carcikei, that seems to be directly related with the Tāntric doctrine of *mantra* discussed so far.

The term Carcikā, which means 'repetition of a word' (while reciting sacred formulae and invocations),[169] is used in Hindu and Buddhist Tantras to designate a goddess. In Orissan Śāktism this name is meant as an epithet of Cāmuṇḍā. It was employed either in the Prachi Valley, an area of Tāntric devotion since the time of the Bhauma-karas, and at the Śākta *pīṭha* bearing the same name located at Banki on the right bank of the Mahanadi, a zone close to the main area of settlement of the above-mentioned *udgātra* communities of Orissa (the ancient Airāvata *maṇḍala*). The present temple of Carcikā at Banki is not very ancient, but the *pīṭha*, as well as the Cāmuṇḍā icon installed therein, date from the Bhauma period.[170] It appears probable that the use of the name Carcikā as an epithet of Cāmuṇḍā was meant to lay stress upon the Goddess' role as Mātṛkā-Śakti or the 'Mother' of all *mantras*. The *carcaka-mālā* (the term *carcaka* is the male form of *carcikā*) is, rather significantly, the rosary, otherwise known as *japa-mālā*, by which a devotee tells his beads while uttering *japa* (continuous repetition of a *mantra* or, alternatively, of one of the numberless names of the Supreme Godhead).[171] On the other hand, the *kavaca*, an appendage to the *Devī-Māhātmya*, states that Carcikā is the protectress of one's upper lip.[172] This passage is most likely referred to the Tāntric identification of the two lips of the worshipper with Śiva and Śakti respectively when *japa* is being muttered, the rhythmical movement of the lips being symbolically regarded as the mystic 'coition' by virtue of which the particular deity evoked by the *mantra* that forms the basic element of that *japa* is thought to be 'generated'.[173]

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[165] M. Biardeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-1 and 192-3.

[166] G. Sastri, 'The Cult of Śakti', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[167] Arthur Avalon (*alias* J. Woodroffe), *Il potere del serpente*, Roma, 1968, pp. 71-85.

[168] W. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-3.

It, thus, seems that the Tāntric practice of *japa*, very popular in Orissa, and particularly among the śūdras, during the Bhauma-kara epoch (as is attested by the aforesaid Buddhist inscriptions) as a means of focusing one's attention on a divine object, had in those days goddess Carcikā, *alias* Cāmuṇḍā, as its 'presiding deity'. Such a name of the Goddess, originated in a Purāṇic context (the *Vāmana Purāṇa* describes Carcikā as born from the sweat that appeared on Śiva's forehead while the god was fighting against the *asura* Andhaka[174]), may have asserted itself in some areas of Orissa during the Bhauma period to designate Mātṛkā-Śakti, i.e., the Tāntric form of the Vedic goddess Vāc, in connection with the process of Sanskritisation of the archaic worship system resorted to by the low-caste people. This system was probably based on the oral repetition, over and over again, of magic formulae, which was, at the same time, one of the constitutive elements of the Atharvavedic tradition. The fact that Cāmuṇḍā — the most fearsome and blood-thirsty form of the Devī, whose relations with the non-Āryan complex of maleficent divinities and spirits appear evident

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[169] M. Monier-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

[170] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 455 and orally from Dr. H. C. Das.

[171] M. Monier-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

[172] T.B. Coburn, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

[173] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, pp. 379-80.

[174] V.S. Agrawala, *Vāmana Purāṇa — A Study*, Varanasi, 1964, p. 136.

— was seemingly chosen in early medieval Orissa as the chief manifestation of Parā-Vāc or Supreme Logos, is perhaps the best evidence that Tantrism, even in its most elevated expressions, was here forced to come to terms with some deeply rooted autochthonous cults centring round the most terrible aspects of Śakti.

Other Tāntric practices, more extreme in their nature inasmuch as that they were specifically connected with the Kāpālika and Kaula sects, were apparently in vogue in Orissa during the Bhauma-kara period. Such practices are discussed in the next section of the present chapter.

GODDESSES CONNECTED WITH NAVIGATION

The Bhauma kingdom carried on an affluent maritime trade with South-East Asian countries which brought about the accumulation of enormous wealth in the hands of the monarchs and the trading class. The development in religion, art and architecture by which the Bhauma epoch was characterised is, no doubt, connected with the growth in volume and frequency of the commercial relations between Orissa and the foreign countries, which commenced at least from the beginning of the Christian era and were greatly expanded during the Śailodbhava period (which preceded the Bhauma one).[175]

Orissa's sea and river ports must have greatly increased in number under the Bhauma rule. Most of such ports have now disappeared due to the progressive silting up of river mouths and the subsequent creation of sand bars along the adjoining sea coasts, which have consequently advanced by degrees into the sea. This land-making process turned in times past many ancient harbours of Orissa into villages of no economic importance situated on the final course of a river. At any rate, the presence, in the villages in question, of a number of shrines dedicated to goddesses connected with navigation in old local legends is a clear evidence of the past importance of those sites as the starting points for sea-faring activity.

The Devī was believed to protect the ships from the dangers in voyages. Stories about ships and boats saved from certain wreck by the intervention of a goddess — a faculty that is also attributed to the Virgin Mary of the Christians — are current all along the coastline of Orissa as well as along its main navigable water-courses. It did not matter whether a particular goddess, whom the sailors and *sādhavas* (merchants) of medieval Orissa used to worship for protection from storms and cyclones, was then conceived as a benevolent or a malevolent one: in fact, the belief according to which the *ghora* (terrific) forms of the Devī can command and neutralise all sorts of danger (personified by evil spirits) was as deep-rooted in the minds of the navigators and of their families as the belief, opposite and complementary to the former, according to which her *aghora* (gentle) forms had a natural inclination for rescuing people from the impeding perils on their way.[176]

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[175] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 93 and 467; K.S. Behera, 'Ancient Orissa/Kalinga and Indonesia: the Maritime Contacts', p. 248.

The most important goddesses of Orissa among those who are traditionally believed to protect navigators and fishermen are listed below in a succession, starting from the north coastal districts of the State and proceeding from thence southwards.

A medieval eight-armed cult image of Cāmuṇḍā, carved out of chlorite and worshipped as Bhīmā or Kālikā, was once installed on the seashore at Bhimpur near Baleswar.[177] This image, now no more *in situ*, was in all evidence propitiated by the local seamen in order to secure the goddess' blessing on their maritime activities.

Another very fine image of Cāmuṇḍā dating from the Bhauma period, having three heads and four arms, is presently worshipped as Brahmāṇī at Avana (Baleswar district), a village that, in by-gone days, was probably situated on the seacoast (even though the latter is now situated at some distance from it). It appears probable that this site, lying amidst old salt-works, was anciently a port specialised in the commerce of salt and rice. A local tradition runs that merchants and sailors used to propitiate this terrific Cāmuṇḍā image for a safe passage across the sea and safe return after a successful business. The goddess was perhaps worshipped in the past with human sacrifices too[178] (*fig*. 9).

In Baleswar town, sailors and merchants used to offer their *pūjā* to goddess Nīmākalī before setting out for sea trade.[179] Other important goddesses of Baleswar district connected with navigation and fishing are Dhāmarai on the mouth of the river Vaitarani, Ḍākeśvarī on the bank of the same river, and Patnamaṅgalā in the city of Narendrapur.[180] These deities are associated with one another as well as with other local goddesses enshrined at different sites on the Vaitarani delta. The latter area represents the natural outlet on the sea for Jajpur, the capital city of the Orissan kingdom in the Bhauma-kara and Somavaṁśī epochs, which is also situated on the Vaitarani. It is, therefore, highly probable that most of the above-mentioned Śākta shrines were established in that very epoch, when commerce along the waterways connecting the Jajpur area with the sea was flourishing.

The meandering river Prachi, a branch of the Mahanadi, had once a navigable course connecting the Bay of Bengal with the Bhubaneswar region. From its many ports, the Oriyā *sādhavas* of the medieval period set out with their boats to oversea countries, where they exchanged the products of Orissa for different valuable goods. At the ruined fort of Golaragarh, a strategic site situated on the mouth of this river, a four-handed image of Pārvatī in a seated pose, having been most likely installed there to protect the navigators, is still today in worship under the name of Citreśvarī. Also goddess Maṅgalā of Kakatpur on the bank of the river Prachi, whose shrine is one of the most celebrated Śākta *pīṭhas* of Orissa, was once associated with trade, as it can be evinced by a local legend relating that her representative icon — an image of the Buddhist goddess Tārā — was installed at the site by a *sādhava* on his return from Ceylon.[181]

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[176] R.K. Mishra, 'Traditions of Temples and Shrines in Ancient Sea Ports of Kalinga', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXIII, Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, pp. 105-8.

[177] N.N. Vasu, *op. cit.*, pp. LXVI-LXIX.

[178] H.C. Das, 'Brāhmaṇical Tāntric Art of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXIX, No. 1, pp. 109-10; B. C. Agasti, 'Archaeological Remains of Abhana', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXII, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 125; H.C. Das, 'Religious History of Balasore', cit., pp. 268-70.

[179] R.K. Mishra, *art. cit.*, p. 106.

[180] H.C. Das, 'Religious History of Balasore', pp. 270-5.

The famous shrine of goddess Rāmacaṇḍī, located not far from the mouth of the river Kushabhadra on the seashore between Puri and Konarak, is particularly sacred to the navigators and fishing folk, who use to present this deity (represented by a medieval image of Mahiṣamardinī) with fish offerings. In Puri town, the shrine of the goddess known as Bānki-muhāṇa Rāmacaṇḍī, located at the site where the river Banki anciently merged into the sea, still now testifies to the past glory of the place as the harbour suburb of the city of Jagannātha. The shrine, having as its presiding deity an image of Mahiṣamardinī, was established by the Bhauma monarchs.[182] Also the reconstructed shrine of Bāliharacaṇḍī, lying half-way between Puri and Chilika Lake and dating back to the Bhauma epoch,[183] was once situated on the seashore, as its very name — *bāli,* indeed, means 'sand' — indicates. The seacost, however, has now receded to some distance from the shrine owing to the progressive forming of sandy ridges there. Consequently, the goddess, represented also in this case by an image of Mahiṣamardinī, could have been worshipped in by-gone days as the protectress of the local fishermen and boatmen.

Goddess Kālijāī, enshrined on a small island of the lake of Chilika, is greatly revered by the boatmen and fishing folk sailing across the deep waters of that lake, of whom she is the protectress and patroness. This goddess-cult may have originated in the course of the early medieval period, when Chilika Lake was an important starting point for maritime trade oversea. The ancient association of the shrine of Tārā-Tāriṇī, rising on a hillock that dominates the lower valley of the river Rishikulya, with the activities of the *sādhavas* of Koṅgoda has been already discussed in the preceding section.

Finally, mention may be here made of the horse-headed tutelary goddess of the fisherman caste (*kaivarta*) of Orissa, Vāselī, whose cult is widespread all along the coasts of the State.

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[181] P.K. Ray, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 29 and 43-4.

[182] H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', p. 133.

[183] *Ibid.*

She is assimilable to the Śākta-Tāntric deity Bhairavī or to Durgā, although in the *Kaivarta-gupta-gītā*, a Purāṇic work composed in the sixteenth century by Acyutānanda Dāsa (a disciple of Śrī Caitanya), she is said to have emanated from Viṣṇu at the time when the world was submerged by the waters of the *pralaya*. The famous dance festival held in honour of Vāselī (*Caitighoṛānāta*), which is discussed in chapter 5 of this work, is believed by some scholars to have originated in the tenth century AD in connection with the spread of the Tantra culture among the low-caste people of coastal Orissa.[184] It is not difficult to recognise in Vāselī, the rescuer of man from waters in the form of a she-horse, a manifestation of the great Goddess as the protectress of fishermen and boatmen. The veneration paid to this deity might even have originated in pre-historic times, when the indigenous ancestors of the *kaivartas*, originally settled in the hill tracts of Orissa, came down to the sea for fishing and undertook a daily fight against the waters that were then incessantly re-designing the swampy and ill-defined coastline of the country.

The Kāpālikas and Kaulas in Orissa

KĀPĀLIKAS

The Kāpālika sect spread all over India starting from the sixth century AD. On the basis of the available epigraphic and literary sources, it is known that, by the eighth century AD, the Kāpālika ascetics were present on the whole of the Deccan. They must also have been found in Orissa by that date.[185]

The Kāpālikas were a sect of Tāntric extremists evolved out of the Pāśupata fold. They did not differentiate so much from their mother-sect as to their doctrine (which, as in the case of the Pāśupata one, consisted in a ritualistic imitation of the mythical exploits of Śiva and in a mystic identification with the great god as a way to attain superhuman powers or *siddhis*), rather they differentiated from it as to their religious practices, that had a close resemblance with those of Śāktism, especially in so far as the practices of human sacrifice and ritual sexual intercourse (in imitation of the eternal union of Śiva and Śakti) are concerned. The Kāpālikas, indeed, carried on the outlandish and anti-social practices of the Pāśupatas to a level of aberration: if what reported about them by their opponents (for no eventual Kāpālika text has survived) corresponds to the truth, they ritually ate disgusting foods and frequented cremation grounds, where they strewed their bodies with the ashes of corpses and recovered human bones to adorn themselves and human skulls which they used as bowls (*kapālas*) filling them with alcoholic drinks during their macabre orgiastic ceremonies. The use of inebriating substances and of sexual intercourse as ways to spiritual realisation is also known to have been part of the Kāpālika ritual. The Kāpālikas reportedly considered almost unbounded the yogic powers that could be obtained through such practices, which were believed by them to provide the *sādhaka* with a 'yogic glance' enabling him to see in Śiva the essential principle of unity and purity inherent in all the manifested creatures and in their respective behaviours, including even the most gruesome and repugnant among these.[186]

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[184] K.B. Das, *A Study of Orissan Folk-Lore*, Santiniketan, 1953, pp. 56-60; D.N. Patnaik, *Festivals of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1982, pp. 23-6; D.N. Patnaik, 'Dance Tradition of Orissa', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 317.

[185] D.N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālamukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972, pp. 52-3.

The form of Śiva that the Kāpālikas, as per the *Śiva Purāṇa*,[187] venerated as the god's *pūrṇa-rūpa* (full form) was Bhairava, the Terrible, the lord of destruction and fear. They also adored him under the name of Kapālin, the Bearer-of-Skulls, from which the term Kāpālika is derived. Besides recalling the garland of skulls which was attributed to Śiva as an ornament already in Kālidāsa's poem *Kumārasambhava* (written around AD 400),[188] the term Kapālin stresses Śiva's mythical aspect as Brahmaśiraśchedaka, the cutter of the fifth head of Brahmā. It is, in fact, reported in some Purāṇas, the most ancient among which is the *Matsya* (CLXXXIII. 83-108),[189] that Śiva became a wandering ascetic in order to expiate the sin of *brahma-hatyā* (the killing of a brāhmaṇa, the latter being symbolised by the head of Brahmā cut off by the god out of rage) and was obliged to perform for twelve years a severe and mysterious penance, known as *mahāvrata* (big vow), with the *kapāla* of Brahmā being always stuck to his hand as a sign of curse, till he reached Banaras, where the divine skull got ultimately removed from Śiva's palm.[190]

Leaving aside the mythological motif of Śiva's rage to Brahmā, of which the various Purāṇas give different accounts, and which is most likely to be connected with some sectarian disputes between the extreme followers of Śaivism and the orthodox brāhmaṇas, it must be pointed out here that the not well-defined *mahāvrata* observed by Śiva as Brahmaśiraśchedaka in order to expiate his *brahma-hatyā* — the greatest crime a man can ever commit according to the Brāhmaṇical tradition — still today represents the model of the homonymous penance being observed in India by the killer of a brāhmaṇa who wants to expiate his sin.[191] But above all, this penance of Śiva's certainly formed the mythic archetype of the *mahāvrata* observed in medieval times by the Śaivite devotees who wanted to join the Kāpālika sect. It is not known what this *mahāvrata* exactly consisted of, yet some scholars believe that the initiate had to decapitate a brāhmaṇa — possibly in order to perform the most blameworthy among the possible forms of human sacrifice — and then take his solemn vow in order to expiate the contracted fault. It is not clear whether this ritual prescription must be understood in a literal or, rather, in a symbolical sense.[192]

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[186] J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-9.

[187] T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, II, Madras, 1916, p. 176.

[188] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. Veda e antico Induismo*, p. 336.

[189] H.C. Das, *Tāntricism: A Study of the Yoginī Cult*, p. 25.

[190] T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-6; J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 465.

[191] P. Filippani-Ronconi, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

It is possible that the Purāṇic and Āgamic accounts relating to the story of Śiva Brahmaśiraśchedaka and to his twelve-year penance were coined by the Kāpālikas themselves to provide a divine archetype for their ascetic observances. Through their imitative repetition of the *mahāvrata* first performed by Śiva, the Kāpālika initiates, in this basically following the tenets of Pāśupatism, aimed at entering into a mystic communion with their tutelary deity and the object of their *bhakti*, Bhairava, and at obtaining, thanks to their self-identification with the latter, the same magical powers (*siddhi*s) that were the prerogatives of the god himself.[193]

The Tāntric religious practices performed as a norm by the Kāpālika ascetics were esoteric (the use of *yantra*s, *mantra*s and *japa*s and the very secrecy of the rites, confined in such dark or secluded shrines as, to remain in Orissa's context, the Vaitāl Deul at Bhubaneswar or the Sixty-Four Yoginī temple at Hirapur), propitiatory (blood sacrifices, including human ones), magico-yogic (with reference, in so far as Orissa is concerned, to a number of yogic deities of the Śaivite affiliation such as Aja-Ekapāda Bhairava, Cāmuṇḍā, Lakulīśa, the *mātṛkā*s and *yoginī*s, etc.), sexo-yogic (the recourse to *pañca-makāra-sādhana* to gain control over the mind and body as well as to gain superhuman magical powers). These practices were also associated with shamanistic ideas centring round the resort to the power of the dead (see the awful rite of *śava-sādhana*, performed to evoke Cāmuṇḍā in the form of a *vetālī* possessing and reviving a corpse, on which the *sādhaka* had to stay seated, trying to overcome his own terror as the corpse talked to him).[194] The imitation of the archetypal figure of Śiva Kapālin was achieved by the Kāpālikas by means of the use of attributes made of human hair, bones and skulls such as the *khaṭvāṅga* (a club made with a bone and skull that replaced, also in iconography, the *lakuṭa* of the Pāśupatas) and the *kapāla* (a skull-bowl), probably borrowed from pre-Vedic religions as it may be suggested by the mention, in the very ancient *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*,[195] of the '*yoga* of the skull' as the earliest form of *yoga* ever manifested by Śiva along with the Pāśupata vow.

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[192] D.N. Lorenzen, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

[193] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

[194] Arthur Avalon (alias J. Woodroffe), *op. cit.*, p. 165, n. 58.

[195] Quoted in W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

The Kāpālika practices, in which ritual sexual intercourse as well as animal and human sacrifices played so great a role, approximated to those of Śāktism, in this differing to a fair extent from those followed by the Pāśupatas, who gave a greater importance to the virtues of non-injury and sexual abstinence. The very name of the Kāpālika doctrine, Somasiddhānta ('the doctrine of *Soma*', meant as the fertilising lunar principle) appears related to the worship of the female principle.[196] The poet Bāṇa (first half of the seventh century AD) was the first to connect in his works the archaic magic rites performed by the Kāpālikas after the tribal customs with the Tāntric cult of Caṇḍikā.[197] It is, furthermore, suggested by the *Mālatīmādhava* of Bhavabhūti (eighth century AD) that the Kāpālikas worshipped Cāmuṇḍā with regular human sacrifices and that some female initiates to the sect, described as *yoginīs* or ogresses, used to wear garlands of skulls and to procure human victims to their male *gurus*.[198] The access of women to the mysterious brotherhood is a distinctive sign of the influence exerted by Śāktism on the Kāpālika sect. The prevalence of the worship of Caṇḍikā/Cāmuṇḍā/Kapālinī over that of Śiva-Bhairava (of whom the former was regarded as the *śakti*) at many of the temples having been supposedly associated in times past with the Kāpālika sect (including the Vaitāl Deul at Bhubaneswar, whose presiding deity, Cāmuṇḍā, is historically worshipped as Kapālinī, the Adorned-with-Skulls)[199] is another proof of the Śākta affiliation of the Kāpālikas themselves, or at least of one of their branches.

It appears altogether probable that the Kāpālikas were the systematisers into an original Tāntric worship pattern of the fertility magic rites connected with spirit-worship and ancestor-worship that were prevalent in ancient times among some of the primitive tribes of India. Through their religious activity, a great deal of non-Āryan elements, originally belonging to the female-oriented cults diffused among the hill tribes of the Vindhyas and the Himālayas, might have got Sanskritised. Some parallels may be also drawn between the Kāpālika cult practices and the primitive religious customs in vogue among the aboriginal tribes of Oceania, Burma, Indonesia and Assam, such as head-hunting, human sacrifice, the cult of skulls, etc. In Orissa's context, this cultic liaison appears very interesting when one considers that maritime contacts between Kaliṅga and Indonesia, involving also a mutual exchange of culture elements, had developed starting from very ancient times.

While 'superior' Tantrism was trying to ground its own doctrines on the Vedic tradition, the Kāpālikas carried on some 'inferior' pre-Āryan traditions based on the veneration of the most horrified and repulsive forms of Śiva and of the great Goddess through the most unorthodox, licentious, awful and disgusting rites ever conceivable by the Indian mind. The hostility of Brāhmaṇism to these extreme Tāntric adepts, of which Indian literature furnishes lots of examples, was most likely provoked by the alarm caused in the orthodox Hindu spheres by the gradual penetration of such tribal elements into the fold of Śaivism-Śāktism.[200] In this connection, the French scholar A. Daniélou makes an interesting parallel between the condemnation, which occurred in the Indian context, of the Kaula-Kāpālika rituals by the puritan brāhmaṇas and the condemnation, which occurred in the Mediterranean context, of the ancient Dionysian rituals by the Christian hierarchy.[201] At any rate, despite their official condemnation by Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy, a number of inscriptions,[202] found throughout the Indian sub-continent, show that the Kāpālikas were held in high esteem by many a monarch and by sections of high-caste people living in the early medieval period, who probably regarded them as authoritative Tāntric initiates worthy of respect and consideration. At the same time, the Kāpālikas must have been regarded as powerful and dreaded priests-magicians by the low-caste Hindus, who may even have considered them the continuators of their own ancestral tribal traditions.

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[196] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. L'Induismo recente*, pp. 277 and 279.

[197] D.N. Lorenzen, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-9.

[198] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 77; P. Filippani-Ronconi, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[199] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 331-2.

In Orissa, in particular, the presence of the Kāpālikas might have encouraged the amalgamation of Tantrism with the black-magic and fertility magic rites diffused among the Kondhs — the supreme experts in human sacrifice — and with the sorcery practices associated with the shamanistic religion of the Śavaras or Saoras (*Śavara-mantra*s, addressed only to the deified ghosts of those who have met with a violent death, have long been famous among the Hindus of Orissa).[203] The tribal cultures of Orissa formed, indeed, a quite fit background for the activity of the Kāpālikas.

As earlier stated, during the Bhauma-kara epoch the Kāpālikas gained a great ascendancy in Orissa, impressing the unmistakable sign of their rites and faith on the Śaiva and Śākta temples of that period. The iconographic representation of terrible-looking divinities endowed with *kapāla*s, *khaṭvāṅga*s, skull-garlands, severed human heads, recumbent human bodies being gnawed by jackals, figures uplifting sacrificial knives, etc., in the Śaiva and Śākta shrines, particularly frequent in Orissa in the period ranging from the eighth to the tenth century AD, can be ascribed to the conjoint influence of Śākta-Tantrism and of the Kāpālika sect. The very introduction of erotic sculptures in the Hindu temple art of Orissa, dating back to the same period, appears associated with the increasing influence exerted in the region by the Kāpālikas along with the Kaulas, both these sects being distinguished by a religiousness imbued with eroticism.[204]

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[200] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[201] A. Daniélou, *Storia dell'India*, Roma, 1984, p. 39.

[202] H.C. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

[203] V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, pp. 231, n. 2, 232 and 235.

[204] K.C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, pp. 234-5.

The Vaitāl Deul of Bhubaneswar is no doubt the highest expression of Tāntric art impregnated with Kāpālika religiousness to be found in Orissa. The presiding deity of the shrine, Cāmuṇḍā, is depicted in the most hideous and gruesome way ever conceivable. She has sunken eyes, gaping mouth, the hood of a snake over her head, a skull-medallion in her coiffure and a corpse under her feet with a jackal gnawing its toes; her body is emaciated, and among her attributes and ornaments are a long garland of skulls, *kapāla*, *khaṭvāṅga* and knife.[205] The goddess is accompanied in the intensely dark and awe-inspiring sanctum of the temple by the already mentioned images of *mātṛkā*s and Tāntric Buddhist deities and, above all, by two most terrific images of Bhairava, both ithyphallic, forming the male counterparts of Cāmuṇḍā herself. The first of such images depicts the god in skeleton-form as surrounded by symbols connected with the practice of human sacrifice (two human heads placed on a tripod, a large butcher's knife, and a *kapāla* supposed to be filled with the blood of a human victim whose severed head lies beside the god), while the second represents an emaciated Śiva engaged in killing the elephant-demon (Gajāsura-saṁhāra-mūrti).[206] The presence of the lower portion of a stone *yūpa* facing the temple doorway may be taken as a further proof of the ancient function of the Vaitāl Deul as a seat of human sacrifices.[207]

Some medieval Orissan texts use the variant form Kāpālinī (the One-of-the-Kāpālins, i.e., the Kāpālikas) instead of the classic form, Kapālinī (a name of the Devī which also finds mention in the *Devī-Māhātmya*[208]) to indicate Cāmuṇḍā of the Vaitāl Deul, with this possibly suggesting that the Kāpālikas of Bhubaneswar regarded Cāmuṇḍā as their tutelary deity and that they considered her even more important than her divine consort, Bhairava.[209] Another of the names by which this Cāmuṇḍā was known, Vetālī,[210] is probably to be connected with the religious practices carried out in her shrine, whose name — Vaitāl Deul — means 'the temple of spirits'.[211] The name Vetālī is found for the first time in the *Harivaṁśa* as an epithet of the great Goddess,[212] yet it may be useful here to remind that the term *vetāla* is also used in some Tāntric texts to indicate a kind of black-magic.[213] To obtain their *siddhi*s, the Kāpālikas used to evoke the *vetāla*s, described in the Āgamas as an obscure class of beings of extremely emaciated appearance, composed by the bones, tendons and skins only, with the knobs of the bones jutting out, the veins visible under the surface of the skins, the belly parched up, the hair stiff and spread out.[214] In a word, the description of *vetālas* reminds under every aspect of the iconography of goddess Cāmuṇḍā/Vetālī, who can be considered to be their mistress. The faculty, attributed by tradition to the *vetālas*, of reviving dead human bodies by taking temporarily possession of them, constituted the pivotal element of the Kāpālika rite known as *śava-sādhana*. Since it was Cāmuṇḍā herself who was thought to materialise herself in a (female?) corpse, being seated upon which the Kāpālika initiate had to celebrate the rite in question through the medium of the *prāṇa* (vital principle) of a *vetālī*, it is not unlikely that the *śava-sādhana* rite was once regularly performed at the Vaitāl Deul, being this shrine consecrated to goddess Cāmuṇḍā/Vetālī. This temple perhaps borrowed its name from the *vetāla* concept associated with the macabre ritual practice of *śava-sādhana*.[215]

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[205] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1294.

[206] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-1.

[207] *Ibid.*, p. 234.

[208] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

[209] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

[210] H.C. Das, 'Brāhmaṇical Tāntric Art of Orissa', p. 125.

[211] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

[212] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

[213] A. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, p. 310.

The other Cāmuṇḍā images dating from the Bhauma period which are still to be found at Bhubaneswar, namely, the ones enshrined in Mohinī temple, Uttareśvara temple and the small Kālī temple situated in Temple Road, are iconographically very similar to the Cāmuṇḍā image of the Vaitāl Deul.[216] All these images were probably adored with Tāntric rites by the Kāpālikas who settled in Bhubaneswar since the eighth century AD.

The concept about Mohinī (the Enchantress, a female incarnation of Viṣṇu), so far as the shrine dedicated to this deity at Bhubaneswar is concerned, has nothing to do with Vaiṣṇavism. This Mohinī, represented by an image of Cāmuṇḍā, appears to be connected with Mahāmāyā (Transcendent-Illusion) of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, who is an aspect of the great Goddess of the Śāktas. Mahāmāyā is also the virtual presiding deity of the Sixty-Four Yoginī temple of Hirapur, a monument to the Kaula-Kāpālika religiousness. Moreover, a legend runs in the Arka *tīrtha* of the Prachi Valley,[217] that Pārvatī once frequented the place in the form of Mohinī — actually disguising her real *yoginī* nature — and attracted there many men to devour them until she was tamed by the advent of her consort Śiva in benign form there. This Mohinī may be identified with the eight-armed image of Cāmuṇḍā installed on the west side of Śobhaneśvara temple at Niali, assigned (the image) to *ca.* the eighth century AD.[218] This Cāmuṇḍā image was, in all likelihood, worshipped by the Kāpālikas through human sacrifices, of which the story about Mohinī devouring the people may represent the legendary reminiscence. With this at the background, it may be tentatively concluded that the divine figure of Mohinī/Mahāmāyā was associated by the Kāpālikas of Orissa to the

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[214] T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 562.

[215] Orally from Prof. G.G. Filippi.

[216] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 154 and 233.

[217] P.K. Ray, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 32.

[218] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Cāmuṇḍā-Yoginī cultic complex, with this securing her a place of regard in the Śākta pantheon of the Bhauma period.

As earlier stated, the existence of Tāntric shrines similar to those of the Vaitāl-Śiśireśvara group in the city of Jajpur — the capital of the Bhauma kingdom — is more than a probability. Such shrines, at which the mixed, Śaiva-Śākta-Buddhistic form of religion characteristic of the early Bhauma-kara period must have initially prevailed, may have housed the terrific, but yet fascinating images of Cāmuṇḍā being presently placed in the compounds of the temples of Trilocaneśvara and of Varāhanātha, built in the Gaṅga and Sūryavaṁśī periods respectively.[219] These cult icons, dating back to the eighth-ninth centuries AD,[220] were very likely associated with the Kāpālika form of worship like the early Cāmuṇḍā images that still survive at Bhubaneswar (*Pls.* IV, V and VI).

Similarly, the Cāmuṇḍā image acting as the presiding deity of Kīcakeśvarī temple at Khiching was, in all likelihood, originally associated with the Kāpālika cult practices. This awe-inspiring cult icon, depicting the goddess in her Kapālinī form, bears the characteristics of the Bhauma art and was, perhaps, originally worshipped in a subsidiary shrine located in the premises of the great Śiva temple of Khiching (*ca.* tenth century AD), now no more in existence, along with two Bhairava images now housed in the local museum.[221] The erotic scenes illustrating Tāntric rituals (in some cases, quite revolting ones), female figures carrying severed heads and *kapālas*, and a sculptural panel possibly representing a scene of human sacrifice, which are depicted on the walls of Kīcakeśvarī temple (but which actually belonged to the collapsed Śiva temple or to some of its subsidiary shrines) or on those of Kutāituṇḍi temple (*ca.* ninth century AD), altogether suggest a strong Kāpālika influence on religious beliefs and practices in the ancient capital city of the Bhañja rulers of Mayurbhanj.[222]

Finally, some sculptural panels illustrating sexual rites are also noticed on the walls of the temple of Siṁhanātha on the Mahanadi. T.E. Donaldson, who assigns this temple to the late ninth century AD, associates the imagery in question with the Kāpālika sect.[223] If, however, one accepts the view, prevalent among the scholars in Kaliṅgan art and architecture, according to which Siṁhanātha temple dates from the last phase of the Śailodbhava rule (*ca.* seventh-eighth centuries AD),[224] the attribution of these erotic sculptures to the influence of the

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[219] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, p. 187.

[220] *Ibid.*

[221] A. Joshi, 'Sculptural Art of Khijjingakotta', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXIII, Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, pp. 34-5; H.C. Das, *art. cit.*, p. 125; K. C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa*, p. 333.

[222] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-4 and 242.

[223] *Ibid.*, pp. 166 and 233-4.

[224] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 377; C.L. Fabri, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

Kāpālikas would imply that this sect was present on the Orissan soil even before the advent of the Bhauma monarchs. Such a hypothesis, nevertheless, has never been advanced by any scholar so far.

Thus, we may tentatively conclude that in the eighth-tenth centuries AD, i.e., the period roughly coinciding with the reign of the Bhauma-karas, the Kāpālika sect had at least four important centres of activity in Orissa, viz., the area of Bhubaneswar (including Hirapur with its Yoginī *pīṭha*), the Prachi Valley, Jajpur and Khiching. The propitiation of goddess Cāmuṇḍā through extreme Śākta-Tāntric rites constituted in those days a distinctive feature of the worship pattern followed by the Kāpālikas of Orissa. The triumph of the Kāpālika religiousness in the Bhauma epoch is historically connected with the parallel ascent of the Kaula religiousness, of which it is now time to give an outline.

KAULAS

The Kaula religious ideals and practices, whose cradle was situated in central India, gradually spread over Orissa — most likely, across the territory of Dakṣiṇa Kośala — in between the last phase of the Bhauma rule and the initial phase of the Somavaṁśī one, namely, in the course of the tenth century AD. The decorative programme of the Orissan temples built in that period is strongly influenced by the mystic-erotic conceptions that were peculiar to both the Kaula and Kāpālika sects. A good instance of this two-fold sectarian influence is represented by the Śākta-Tāntric temple of Vārāhī at Chaurasi in the Prachi Valley (tenth century AD), whose friezes, when they do not portray deities, depict for the most part Tāntric sexual rites that could have been indifferently performed either by Kaula or by Kāpālika initiates. The establishment of the two Yoginī temples still existing in Orissa, one at Hirapur near Bhubaneswar and the other at Ranipur Jharial in the heart of the ancient kingdom of Dakṣiṇa Kośala, must be traced back to the ascendancy exerted by the Kaula and the Kāpālika initiates on the Bhaumas (in the case of the Kāpālikas) and the Somavaṁśīs (in the case of the Kaulas) respectively. As regards specifically Śaivism, the passage from the predominance of Pāśupatism to that of left-hand Tantrism within this faith was accomplished in Orissa thanks to the development of the Kaula-Kāpālika cultic syndrome.[225]

It is necessary to point out here that the Sanskrit term *kaula*, indicating the mystic union of the male and female principles in the *sādhaka*'s soul in imitation of Śiva and Śakti's eternal copulation, when applied to Orissa's religious context in the eighth-tenth centuries AD does not denote the 'classic' Kaula doctrine attributed to the *guru* Matsyendranātha (the half-legendary Tāntric author whose celebrated treatise *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* was regarded as most authoritative by the Kaulas of the later medieval period). The composition of the

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[225] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, pp. 196 and 280-1; H.C. Das, *Tāntricism: A Study of the Yoginī Cult*, p. 23.

Kaulajñānanirṇaya is, in fact, traced back by the scholars to the eleventh century AD,[226] when the Kaula ideals and practices had already got a large circulation all over Orissa. Therefore, when the term Kaula is used with reference to early medieval Orissan history, it has to be understood in a more general sense, namely, as designating a Tāntric religious undercurrent based on the doctrine of the mystic union of the Tāntric *vīra* (hero) with the Supreme Godhead — represented by the divine couple Śiva-Śakti — achieved with the support of sexo-yogic practices. The latter practices had, no doubt, gained a large popularity all over the Indian sub-continent from at least the early medieval period, and Matsyendranātha himself, in case he is not only a legendary figure, is regarded by most of scholars as but their systematiser into a full-fledged system of mystic-esoteric teachings.[227]

Thus, only in a wider context one can speak of a penetration of the Kaula ideals and practices into Orissa in the period preceding the foundation of the 'classic' Kaula school thanks to Matsyendranātha. Accordingly, when the term *kaula* is employed in association with the Bhauma period of Orissan history, it above all indicates a kind of erotic spirituality that by that time had pervaded the developed Pāśupata-Kāpālika cultic syndrome, and not the later Tāntric sect bearing the same name.

It is stated in one of the legendary narratives of the origin of the Kaula school that Matsyendranātha — who was actually an incarnation of Bhairava himself in the form of a fish — revealed his esoteric teachings to his consort Bhairavī and to a group of *yoginī*s gathered at the Śākta *pīṭha* of Kāmarūpa in Assam, regarded by tradition as the seat of the *yoni* portion of Satī having fallen from the sky. The *yoginī*s referred to in this tradition may at one time represent either the *śakti*s surrounding Śiva in the mystic circle known as *Yoginī Kaula* (as per Matsyendranātha's doctrine) and the deified womenfolk or priestesses, initiated in Tāntric *yoga* and regarded as the living incarnations of Śakti, in the company of whom the historical Kaulas used to perform their sexoyogic rituals.[228] The Kaulas gave a fundamental importance to mundane *yoginī*s (of whom divine *yoginī*s perhaps represented the mythic and cultic projection) and considered them the main depositories and dispensers of the secret knowledge of *Kaulamārga*, the yogic-ritualistic process that enabled a Kaula initiate to realise in his own person the mystic union of the male and female principles (*Akula* and *Kula*, i.e., Śiva and Śakti).[229] Sexual intercourse with a *yoginī* previously consecrated in the *nyāsa* ceremony (a ritual projection of divinities into various parts of the body) was conceived by the Kaulas as a mystic-sympathetic process through which the human couple was thought to become a divine one. In M. Eliade's opinion this conception was indebted to the proto-Śākta complex of magico-yogic doctrines incorporated in the fertility rites that were anciently in vogue among the non-Āryan peoples inhabiting the Indian sub-continent.[230] The early medieval Orissan culture was altogether very much influenced by tribal religious practices and beliefs, for which reason it may be inferred that the *vāmācāra* religiousness based on sexo-yogic rituals, typical of the Kaula sect, found in this land a quite fit ground for its expansion, all the more that the Kāpālikas, whose activity of proselytism preceded the penetration of the Kaula doctrines into Orissa, had already introduced a great deal of sexo-yogic practices into the allied Śiva-Śakti cults from at least the beginning of the Bhauma epoch.

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[226] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

[227] H.C. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[228] V.W. Karambelkar, *art. cit.*, pp. 365 and 377.

[229] H.C. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

That in the subsequent Somavaṁśī epoch figures of mundane *yoginī*s — very likely connected with the Kaula sect or, at any rate, with the Śākta-Tāntric religious milieu — acted as powerful priestesses or sorceresses performing occult and esoteric rites, is demonstrated by a number of local legends concerning the magical activities of the so-called 'Seven Tāntric Maidens', a group of witches who perhaps really lived in Orissa in the course of the eleventh century AD. Their main seat is traditionally placed in the city of Patnagarh in Balangir district, which is reported to have been renamed Kumārīpatna (the Port-of-Maidens) after them. Their fame extended along the course of the river Mahanadi as far as Puri, and their names — Netai Dobhaṇī, Patrapindhi Saharuṇī (also known as Patara Savaruṇī), Gaṅgi Ganduṇī, Suā Teluṇī, Janandei Maluṇī, Luhukuṭi Lahuruṇī and Sukuṭi Chamāruṇī — are still nowadays included in the *mantra*s being recited on the occasion of exorcism rites in many areas of Orissa (for instance, at Sonepur and at Puri).[231] One of the Seven Tāntric Maidens, Netai Dobhaṇī, is even stated in the *Mādalā Pāñji* (the chronicle written by the priests of the temple of Jagannātha at Puri) to have been the teacher of sorcery of the boy Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga (AD 1078-1150), who, thanks to the supernatural powers this Tāntric sorceress endowed him with, would have succeeded in occupying the throne of the Somavaṁśīs.[232] The legend also runs at Puri, that Netai Dobhaṇī was an ardent worshipper of Lord Jagannātha.[233] These stories reveal the extent to which the cult of Jagannātha, highlighted by king Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga of the Gaṅga dynasty, was influenced, in its initial stages, by the Kaula-Yoginī cultic complex, symbolically represented in the legend at issue by one of the Seven Tāntric Maidens. It is worth noticing that at least two of these half-legendary sorceresses, Netai Dobhaṇī and Patara Savaruṇī, are regarded as Saoras by birth. Sorcery and magical incantations are traditionally practised on a large scale by the Hinduised

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[230] M. Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, London, 1958, p. 343.

[231] J.P. Singhdeo, 'Archaeological Remains of Patnagarh', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXIII, Nos. 3 and 4, pp. 34 and 37.

[232] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

[233] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-4.

Saoras of Orissa, and *Śavara-mantras*, meant to appease maleficent spirits, are still nowadays very famous among the Oriyā Hindus.[234] The links of this ancient magic lore, called *Śavarī-vidyā* due to its historical association with Saora female practitioners, with the Tāntric magic resorted to by the medieval Kaula adepts of Orissa (possibly within the ambit of Yoginī cult) are susceptible of forming a still unexplored field of research.

It is not the case here to expound the complex Kaula doctrines based upon the *sādhaka*'s initiation to three subsequent stages of consciousness respectively called *vāmācāra*, *siddhāntācāra* and *kaulācāra*, the identification *yoga-bhoga* (enjoyment), the recourse to *pañcamakāra-sādhana*, the practice of *kuṇḍalinī-yoga*, etc.,[235] all the more that it is not known whether such doctrines, systematised for the first time in the course of the eleventh century AD, were part or not of the proto-Kaula religiousness diffused in Orissa in the eighth-tenth centuries AD. What appears almost certain is that both the Kaula and Kāpālika ascetics of early medieval Orissa used to live in spiritual intimacy with *yoginīs*, who were regarded as human manifestations of the universal Śakti and as instruments of transformation of their associated *sādhakas* into Śiva in and through the insight and pleasures of sex.[236]

That Tāntric orgiastic rituals were celebrated in the Yoginī temples of Orissa may be a mere conjecture, but nevertheless, the erotic scenes carved on the walls of some Orissan temples dating from the tenth century AD, such as Vārāhī temple at Chaurasi and Kīcakeśvarī temple at Khiching, testify to the diffusion, by that time, of Tāntric erotic rituals in the country, or at least in some of its secluded Śākta-Tāntric pockets. Eight of the erotic images appearing in the major niches of Vārāhī temple at Chaurasi have been identified by R.N. Banerjea as illustrating stages of ritual love-making (*kāmakalā-prayoga*) as described in the unpublished Oriyā manuscript called *Kaula Cūḍāmaṇi*[237] (*fig.* 62).

Again in connection with the Kaula erotic spirituality, the *Śilpa-Prakāśa* — the already mentioned medieval Tāntric *śilpa-śāstra* of Orissa — prescribes that the rows of amorous sculptures (*kāmabandhas*) that were customarily carved in rilievo style on the upper walls of the Tāntric temples of Orissa, particularly from the closing part of the Bhauma period onwards, had to be patterned on the *kāmakalā-yantra* (the mystic diagram of love images), which probably drew inspiration from the ancient Āgamic speculations on *kāmakalā-vidyā* (the science of love images). The *kāmakalā-yantra*, laid down by the *sthāpati* below the *mithuna* (love-play) and *maithuna* (sex-congress) images, is mentioned in this text as the

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234. S.N. Roy, 'The Savaras of Orissa', *Man in India*, vol. VII (1927), pp. 296-301; V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 231, n. 2 and p. 232.

235. J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-64.

236. H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', p. 110.

237. J.N. Banerjea, 'The Vārāhī Temple at Caurāsi', in the *Dr. Mirashi Felicitations Volume*, Nagpur, 1965, pp. 352-3.

most important and sacred decoration of the temple outer parts;[238] yet, the fact that this *yantra* is said in the same work to be the supreme secret of the *kaulācāra* (the last stage of the *kaulamārga*), which had not to be revealed to any uninitiate and had, in consequence, to be camouflaged with erotic carvings, may indicate that the latter sculptures were carved on the walls of Orissan temples to illustrate the erotic elements of the Kaula doctrine but also, at the same time, to conceal their occult foundations.

> This seems to imply that ordinary people were given only that which they could understand, and were liberally allowed to take delight in it, so that they might not try to probe into metaphysical secrets which were beyond the reach of their understanding. This delight was allowed to them because no lewd or scurrilous intention had inspired these images. Sexual love was regarded as a sacred law of nature, which had to be revered and worshipped as such. . . . But, when it came to the deeper, esoteric sense of sex and its manipulation as a form of *sādhana*, it necessarily had to remain the exclusive preserve of the adepts.[239]

In a word, the Kaulas of medieval Orissa — admitted that the *Śilpa-Prakāśa* is really a Kaula work composed in the Somavaṁśī age as its editors maintain[240] — were inclined to protect their esoteric doctrines from the curiosity and misinterpretations of the uninitiated, who were, thus, prevented from performing on their own the 'morally dangerous' Kaula rites.[241] So far as their impact on common devotees is concerned, the amorous or erotic sculptures of the Kaula matrix pervading the decorative project of a large number of medieval Tāntric temples of Orissa, no matter as to whether they were affiliated to the Śaiva, Śākta or even to the Vaiṣṇava and Saura faiths (see the erotic imagery of Jagannātha temple at Puri and the Sun temple at Konarak), were in all likelihood meant to show that desire is the root of the cosmic manifestation, the impulse by means of which all inanimate things and all living beings are created, preserved and destroyed. In the Tāntric outlook, the manifested world is the product of Śiva and Śakti's unceasing interplay, generally conceived in a symbolic way as an eternal love play culminating in the mythic divine coition. The *mithuna/maithuna* images were exoterically meant to illustrate to the uninitiated the mystic conception of divine sexuality, whereas the Tāntric initiates remained in the exclusive possession of the esoteric doctrine termed as Kaula (the union of Śiva and Śakti in the adept's consciousness) and the connected secret sexual rites.

The sexo-yogic poses illustrated in the *kāmabandhas* of the Tāntric temples of Orissa —

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[238] A. Boner and S. R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. XI-XII (from the preface by V.S. Agrawala).

[239] *Ibid.*, pp. LIV-LV.

[240] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. XVII-XXI.

[241] *Ibid.*, p. LIV.

as, on the other hand, it was also the case with Tāntric temples built in other regions of India — might have represented, in the eyes of the common devotees, the continuity and persistence of primitive and popular culture elements in the medieval Hindu society.[242] The non-Vedic magic practices and fertility rituals that supposedly typified the female-oriented religions of pre-historic Kaliṅga could have been revived in the minds of the low-caste Tāntric devotees — the depositories of the memory of the lost tribal traditions — through their transfiguration into sculptural scenes depicting sexo-yogic rites thanks to the mediation of the Kaula-Kāpālika ascetics. Under this particular aspect, the erotic art of medieval Orissa can be considered to be one of the finished products of the process of Sanskritisation of the earlier tribal religions, a fruit that was considered ripe for being publicly picked only when historical conditions, with the gradual ascent of Tantrism to a high position in the religious outlook of the royal family and the aristocracy of the Bhauma-kara kingdom starting from the eighth century AD, became favourable for that.

Yet, according to K.V. Soundara Rajan, the erotic art of medieval Orissa was but a conventionalised formula of which the pervasive Kaula matrix of the temple artists and patrons was responsible. In the opinion of this scholar, the *kāmabandhas* of Orissan temples were conceived as propitious or apotropaic art motifs aimed at ensuring the people's welfare, namely, just as the subservient supports to spiritual realisation. In other words, they would have been, as a whole, an ancillary and non-essential art theme. They might also have functioned, in the minds of the devotees, as figures imparted with a magical power of the sympathetic type, in which the low-caste people in particular might have found an echo of the magical conceptions underlying the ancient indigenous rites of fertility based on love-making. Thus, the erotic motifs depicted on Orissan temples would have been imparted with a secondary symbolism rather than with a primary one, directly related to the *vāmācāra* rites performed by the Kaula and Kāpālika adepts. It is true that erotic figures began to be carved in a great profusion on the outer walls of Orissan temples only starting from the later Somavaṁśī epoch (eleventh century AD), when the phase of ascendancy of the Pāśupata-Kaula-Kāpālika allied sects was going to come to an end in the country. Tantrism was, thus, involved in the magnificent flowering of the erotic art of Orissa only in a wider sense, i.e., as a part of the ethos of the monarchs, sculptors and devotees of that time. It may also be suggested here that, in a period of restoration of Āgamic Śaivism and of *dakṣiṇācāra* Śāktism, such as the Somavaṁśī one was, the depiction of erotic motifs on temples was perhaps aimed at atrophying the 'morally dangerous' sexual desire in the common devotees' minds through its 'sublimation' rather than at glorifying the religious significance of sex (as, on the contrary, it was apparently the case with the erotic friezes carved on the earlier Tāntric temples, built under the influence of the Pāśupata-Kaula-Kāpālika esoteric matrix).[243]

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[242] D. Desai, *Erotic Sculptures of India — A Socio-Cultural Study*, New Delhi, 1975, p. 203.

[243] K.V. Soundara Rajan, *op. cit.*, pp. 106, 114-5 and 128.

K.V. Soundara Rajan concludes his interesting argument with saying that the Śākta-Tāntric phase of Orissan religious history (*ca.* eighth-tenth centuries AD) was but a sort of blind alley, from which the royal dynasties who followed the Bhauma-karas in the rule of Orissa came out by veering progressively to a less degenerated and more virtuous form of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, in which the *vāmācāra* practices typical of the Kaula and Kāpālika sects had no more chance of expansion. The constant ascent of Vaiṣṇavism in the form of Jagannātha cult starting from the Somavaṁśī period was the most important sign of this more moderate and less radical new religious policy. Ever after, erotic art on temple architecture became functionally defunct and fossilised in Orissa, although it was utilised by routine even by the sculptors of the Imperial Gaṅga period to decorate, for instance, the walls of Jagannātha temple at Puri and of the Sun temple at Konarak, and by the sculptors of the later medieval and modern periods as a conventionalised part of the overall decorative programme of the standard Hindu temple. The *bhakti*-based temple ritual — imbued, at any rate, with Tāntric elements originated in the earlier phases of Orissan religious history — became the religious landmark in Orissa starting from the eleventh century AD, by which time the perilous path of *vāmācāra,* exemplified in the scenes of ritualistic sexual congress (often evincing hedonistic aspects) depicted on the temples of the Bhauma and early Somavaṁśī periods, definitively 'fell into the dustbin of esoteric Śākta metaphysical history of central India'.[244]

Śakti cult in the Somavaṁśī period

Around the mid-part of the tenth century AD the Bhauma kingdom, weakened by internal turmoils and dissensions as well as by the continuous interference of the neighbouring powers (the Somavaṁśīs of North-West Orissa and the Bhañjas of the Baudh region) in its internal affairs, was occupied by king Yayāti I of the Somavaṁśī dynasty. By virtue of this exploit, the Somavaṁśīs became the rulers of the coastal provinces of Orissa.[245]

In its heyday, between the eighth and ninth centuries AD, the Bhauma kingdom had extended from the Medinipur (Midnapore) district of present West Bengal in the north to the Godavari Valley in the south,[246] but yet its dominions had never included the north-western tracts of Orissa, which in those centuries were being ruled over by the Pāṇḍuvaṁśīs or Early Somavaṁśīs, having their capital at Sirpur, a centre on the Mahanadi situated in the Chhatisgarh region (now included in Madhya Pradesh). The kingdom of the Pāṇḍuvaṁśīs was, as it seems, destroyed by the Kalacuris of central India in around the second half of the ninth century AD, yet a supposed member of the dynasty, Janmejaya I (*ca.* AD 882-922), succeeded in founding another kingdom in the Sambalpur-Balangir-Kalahandi region of Orissa with its capital at Sonepur on the Mahanadi. The new Somavaṁśī kingdom, named (Dakṣiṇa) Kośala, exerted since the beginning a strong and increasing influence on the declining Bhauma kingdom until Janmejaya's successor, Yayati I (*ca.* AD 922-55), annexed at different times the alluvial plains of Orissa (Utkala), then governed by the last Bhauma queens and by the Bhañja feudal rulers, and united them politically and culturally, for the first time in their history, to the upper Mahanadi Valley region.[247]

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[244] *Ibid.*, pp. 143 and 147.

[245] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.

[246] *Ibid.*, pp. 76-7 and 86.

The Somavaṁśī monarchs, popularly known as Keśaris, ruled over the whole territory covered by the modern State of Orissa for more than one hundred-fifty years till the king of Kaliṅga (meant as the northern coastal provinces of Andhra Pradesh), Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga of the Eastern Gaṅga dynasty, conquered their kingdom in AD 1110. They consolidated the united kingdom of Utkala and Kośala, reinforced its administration and, as far as the religious sphere is concerned, liberally patronised the temple building activity of all sects of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, laying, however, a special stress on Śaivism, of which they were the staunch followers. The magnificent Śaiva sanctuaries of Mukteśvara, Liṅgarāja, Rājarāṇī, Brahmeśvara and a number of others, erected at Bhubaneswar by the Somavaṁśīs, are unanimously considered to be the highest fulfilment of the Kaliṅga School of Art and Architecture.

Yet the form of Śaivism fostered by the Somavaṁśīs was quite different from the one that had prevailed in Orissa during the Bhauma period. The Somavaṁśīs, in fact, did not favour the Tāntric practices so prodigally as the Bhauma-karas had done, even though they appear to have had some inclination for the Kaula spirituality, as it may be inferred from the fact, that all of their copper-plate grants commence with verses praising the pursuit of love.[248] The extreme Śākta-Tāntric practices indulged in by the Kaula-Kāpālika ascetics of the Bhauma-kara period were discouraged by the Somavaṁśī monarchs, the most celebrated among whom, Yayāti I, is stated in an old tradition to have invited to Jajpur ten thousand orthodox brāhmaṇas from Kanauj to perform a series of solemn Vedic sacrifices, including the *aśvamedha* (horse-sacrifice), so as to extirpate from that town, which had been formerly the main seat of power of the Bhauma rulers, the very memory of the syncretistic cults and unorthodox rituals that had been in vogue there for centuries.[249] The definitive triumph of Brāhmaṇical ideals and rituals at the Śākta shrine of Virajā (the most celebrated *pīṭha* of Orissa) after a long history of compromises with Buddhism and other unorthodox religious movements was probably the achievement of Yayāti I.[250]

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[247] *Ibid.*, pp. 96-106.

[248] V. Dehejia, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

[249] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 312, 318-20 and 351.

[250] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, pp. 10-1.

EVOLUTION OF ŚAIVISM

As already indicated, the Pāśupata sect of Śaivism, which during the Bhauma-kara period had flourished in Orissa adopting a mixed cult pattern within whose framework the Śākta-Kaula-Kāpālika elements predominated, virtually lost its separate identity after the Somavaṁśī dynasty rose to power in the kingdom. This is suggested by the fact that either the Lakulīśa image, reflecting the Pāśupata affiliation of the builders of the temples and their royal patrons, and the generalised ithyphallic treatment of the Śaiva male deities (derived from the yogic content of the Pāśupata doctrine), were eliminated from Orissan Śaiva shrines in the course of the tenth century AD, although some forms of Śiva-Bhairava continued to be depicted *ūrdhvaliṅga* in the context of Śākta-Tāntric art. Since then on the deities represented on the Śaiva temples of Orissa were generally those of the standardised Āgamic tradition, to a great extent coinciding with those of the 'orthodox' Purāṇic tradition. Such Śaiva and Śākta divinities were, for the most part, deprived of the Tāntric-yogic connotations which were characteristic of the earlier phases of Kaliṅgan art.[251]

Following this main trend, during the Somavaṁśī epoch the *pārśva-devatās* of the Śaivite shrines of Orissa were invariably represented, with rare exceptions, by the images of Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya. The restoration of religious usages to the pristine Āgamic-Purāṇic concepts was made explicit by the generalised replacement of the purely Tāntric image of Mahiṣamardinī — which during the Bhauma period was canonically installed in the north niche of the standard Śaiva temple — with the more 'tranquillising' image of Pārvatī, which had already acted as *pārśva-devatā* in all the Śaiva temples erected during the Śailodbhava period (i.e., prior to the establishment of the Bhauma rule over Orissa).[252] The awe-inspiring Tāntric divinities, of course, were not eliminated from the imagery of Orissan Śaiva temples, yet they were often relegated into secluded subsidiary shrines of their own. In the Somavaṁśī period this was frequently the case with the images of Aja-Ekapāda Bhairava, Mahiṣamardinī and Siṁhavāhinī Durgā, Cāmuṇḍā and Saptamātṛkās. The cult icons of Durgā and Cāmuṇḍā were usually enshrined in that period within special sanctuaries built on the north side of the temple compound.[253] In certain cases the Mahiṣamardinī images placed in this class of shrines — such as, for instance, the ones, dating from the eleventh-twelfth centuries AD,[254] lying in the compounds of the Śaiva temples of Vaṭeśvara and Śukleśvara in Cuttack district respectively — were monumental in size.

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[251] K.V. Soundara Rajan, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-5, 114 and 128.

[252] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1062.

[253] *Ibid.*, pp. 1068 and 1078.

[254] *Ibid.*, p. 1283.

EVOLUTION OF ŚĀKTISM

On the purely Śākta side the dominant trend in the Somavaṁśī period consisted in softening or eliminating the most awful and gruesome aspects of Śakti-worship as popularised in Orissa during the Bhauma-kara period. As the best instance of this new religious trend the fact can be cited, that all of the Śākta shrines erected by the Somavaṁśīs at Bhubaneswar are presided over by goddesses in pacific form, even though the *khākharā* type of temple, conceived by the architects of the Bhauma period to enshrine the representative icons of the great goddess in her terrific manifestations (Mahiṣamardinī, Cāmuṇḍā or Saptamātṛkās), was still being used by the architects of the Somavaṁśī period. The *khākharā* temple dedicated to goddess Gaurī in the Kedāra-Gaurī temple compound (tenth century AD)[255] as well as two other such shrines respectively dedicated to the goddesses Gopālinī and Sāvitrī in the Liṅgarāja complex (*ca.* early twelfth century AD)[256] testify, by virtue of the non-fearful aspect of their own presiding deities, to the more moderate course imparted to Śakti cult at Bhubaneswar by the Somavaṁśī rulers.

Some analogous considerations can be made in regard to the development of Mātṛkā cult, to which the Somavaṁśīs gave a great impulse after having depurated it from its earlier (supposed) *vāmācāra* Tāntric aspects. The artists of the Somavaṁśī epoch, in fact, stressed the benevolent, motherly and nurturing aspect of the *mātṛkās* by associating each of these deities (Cāmuṇḍā — as it is obvious — excepted) with a baby placed on their lap. The earlier *mātṛkā* images of Orissa, dating from the Śailodbhava and Bhauma-kara periods, do not hold babies in their arms, while, on the other hand, the baby-in-lap motif is present in the sets of *mātṛkās* found at Sirpur and Pujaripali in Madhya Pradesh, two sites once included in the Pāṇḍuvaṁśī or Early Somavaṁśī kingdom of the upper Mahanadi Valley, as well as in the sets found at Ranipur-Jharial and Belkhandi in the Balangir-Kalahandi region, two centres of Somavaṁśī art assigned to the ninth-tenth centuries AD. It is, thus, probable that the Somavaṁśī monarchs, after having conquered the coastal provinces of Orissa, introduced there the iconographic motif of the child being held by each *mātṛkā* in her own arms, which was very popular in their homeland the Chhatisgarh region.[257]

In the *mātṛkā* sets of Mukteśvara temple at Bhubaneswar, the Sub-Divisional Officer compound and Daśāśvamedha *ghāṭ* at Jajpur, Mārkaṇḍeśvara temple at Puri and the collapsed Mātṛkā temple at Sathalapura in Cuttack district — all stylistically assignable to the tenth century AD, viz., to the initial part of the Somavaṁśī rule over coastal Orissa[258] — the baby-in-lap motif is always present. This iconographic feature confines in the background the earlier mythological descriptions of the *mātr̥kās* as a band of dangerous, ferocious, warlike, blood-thirsty and child-afflicting ogresses with emphasising, on the contrary, their mother-aspect, which circumstance has led some scholars to compare these goddesses with some ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian 'mother goddesses' depicted with a baby on their lap or with the Virgin and Child of the Christians (even though such comparisons appear incorrect, as it will be discussed in chapter 4).

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[255] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, pp. 291-2.

[256] *Ibid.*, pp. 402-3. It is, however, not clear whether the building of these two *khākharā* shrines was patronised by the Somavaṁśī monarchs or rather by the later Gaṅga monarchs.

[257] K.C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, p. 136; M.P. Das, 'Worship of Saptamātṛkās and Their Representation in Orissan Temples', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XI, No. 2, pp. 119-20; T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1072.

The incorporation of the folk goddess Maṅgalā into the Brāhmaṇical Śākta pantheon of Orissa was, most likely, another achievement of the Somavaṁśī dynasty. The great temple dedicated to this goddess at Kakatpur, although dating back, in its present forms, only to the fifteenth century AD,[259] was built on the ruins of an earlier shrine and has an image of the Mahāyāna Buddhist goddess Tārā assignable to about the tenth century AD as its presiding deity. On the other hand, goddess Maṅgalā of Kakatpur is associated with the cult of Jagannātha, of which the Somavaṁśīs were the first known royal patrons (king Yayāti I is credited with the erection of an early temple of Jagannātha at Puri, later on rebuilt by Coḍagaṅgadeva).[260] It appears, thus, probable that the Somavaṁśī rulers were responsible for the Sanskritisation of the popular semi-tribal cult of Maṅgalā, which in subsequent epochs would have formed a sort of religious bridge uniting Orissan Śāktism to Vaiṣṇavism.

The *dakṣiṇācāra*-oriented form of Śakti-worship promoted by the Somavaṁśī rulers left little space for such *vāmācāra*-oriented independent Śākta cults as those of Cāmuṇḍā and Vārāhī, which were consequently relegated into some peripheral and isolated areas of Orissa. Caṇḍī temple at Kishorpur in Mayurbhanj district (*ca.* tenth-eleventh centuries AD),[261] having an impressive Cāmuṇḍā image as its presiding deity, and the already mentioned Vārāhī temple at Chaurasi, dating from the period of transition from the Bhauma rule to the Somavaṁśī one (tenth century AD),[262] are two among the most remarkable shrines, belonging to the *khākharā* order, that were consecrated to such extreme Tāntric cults in the period in question. (*figs.* 51 and 54) Shrines dedicated to Cāmuṇḍā were also built in the same period at Badasahi and at Pedagadi in north-eastern Orissa. Possibly in the same period, the Bhañja feudal overlords of the hilly region of Mayurbhanj installed goddess Cāmuṇḍā/Kīcakeśvarī as their family deity, a function this goddess still detains in our days. In fact, the dethroned descendants of the Bhañja dynasty, living in Baripada (Mayurbhanj district), still nowadays worship Cāmuṇḍā/Kīcakeśvarī as their family deity.[263]

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[258] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, pp. 351-2.

[259] *Ibid.*, II, Leiden, 1986, p. 691.

[260] K.C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa*, pp. 105-6.

[261] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, p. 343.

[262] *Ibid.*, p. 274.

To quote K.V. Soundara Rajan's words, it can be summed up here that, in the Somavaṁśī period, the pressure of *vāmācāra* Śāktism was 'well overwhelmed and pushed into the hinterlands by the containing main core-values of Hinduism in the community worship in temples'.[264]

ŚIVA AND PĀRVATĪ'S AMOROUS RELATIONSHIP

The favour accorded by the Somavaṁśī monarchs to a Śaiva-Śākta cult pattern within which the most extreme, radical and revolting Tāntric conceptions were deliberately eschewed to be replaced with a more generic and acceptable glorification of Śiva and Pārvatī's metaphysical love affair (in conformity with the Āgamic and Purāṇic traditions) is probably at the root of a series of medieval myths and legends giving account of the origin of various Hindu monuments of Bhubaneswar, erected for the most part in the Somavaṁśī age (in the course of which Bhubaneswar was turned into a magnificent temple city). The mythical tales at issue — which are included in some old Orissan Purāṇic texts such as, for instance, the *Ekāmra Purāṇa* — stress Śiva-Pārvatī amorous relationship in such a way, that the imprint of the moderate Kaula doctrines fostered by the Somavaṁśīs clearly appears through them.

One of such myths, explaining the origin of the many Śaiva and Śākta shrines surrounding in a circle the large Bindusāgara tank, associates such shrines with the *rāsa-krīḍā* (sporting dalliance) that was reportedly staged at that place by Śiva and Pārvatī at the latter's request in the company of eight Śambhus (emanations of Śiva) and eight Gaurīs (emanations of Pārvatī), who were ultimately installed by the great god as the presiding deities of sixteen shrines lying all around the tank. The sporting dalliance was initiated by the eight so-formed couples of Śambhus and Gaurīs in the presence of the supreme Divine Couple on the full moon night in the month of Caitra (March-April). During that month, a series of allied Śiva-Śakti festivals, showing a Tāntric nature, are still today celebrated in Orissa.[265] This *rāsa-krīḍā*, performed in order to turn Śiva and Pārvatī's spiritual bliss and sensuous pleasure, caused by their everlasting amorous intercourse, into the divine power that sustains the universe and enables man to attain salvation, is, thus, conceived here as a divine love-play made of *rāsa* (pleasant emotion). There is here a narrative analogy with the *rāsalīlā*, the erotic dance that, according to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, was performed by Kṛṣṇa with sixteen thousand *gopīs* (cowherdesses) after the god had emanated as many duplicates of his own person in order to save, all at once, his devotees' souls (personified by the *gopīs*). The elaboration of this Tāntric myth might have felt the effects of the then emerging *bhakti* movement of Vaiṣṇavism, which in the subsequent Gaṅga period would have deeply changed the form of Śaivism in vogue in Bhubaneswar town thanks to the introduction of the syncretistic cult of Harihara into the Liṅgarāja temple worship-pattern; nevertheless, the motif of Śiva's sporting dalliance with Pārvatī presents a coherence of its own inasmuch as it emphasises the erotic relationship uniting Śiva, the Puruṣa absorbed in his divine *yoga*, and his consort the Mahādevī, the manifested universe made up of *śakti-māyā-prakṛti* attracting the former into the eternal game of cosmic transformation.[266]

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[263] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

[264] K.V. Soundara Rajan, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

[265] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

Thus, in the Somavaṁśī epoch the cult of Pārvatī (otherwise known in Orissa as Gaurī) was closely allied with Śaivism in a Tāntric religious context dominated by the Kaula concept about the amorous relationship eternally uniting the supreme male and female principles. This goddess-cult, being not prejudicially hostile to Vaiṣṇavism (elements of which were, on the contrary, gradually penetrating into it), had all the potentialities to become the most important Śākta cult at Bhubaneswar and thence, in all likelihood, also in the whole of the coastal plains of Orissa. Nevertheless, this potential developmental line of Śakti cult in Orissa was soon interrupted owing to the overpowering ascent of Vaiṣṇavism in the eleventh-twelfth centuries AD, a religious event which deeply altered the relative forces of the different Hindu faiths and the virtual equilibrium which the religious life of the country had been based on from the Gupta age onwards. In fact, the growing popularity of the cult of Jagannātha in the Gaṅga period made Śaivism and Śāktism progressively take a back seat in Orissa's religious scenery, as it will be shown in the next section of this chapter.

THE TRIUMPH OF FEMININE BEAUTY IN ORISSAN SCULPTURE

To conclude this sketch of the development of Śakti cult in Orissa during the Somavaṁśī period, mention is here to be made of the triumph, occurred in that epoch, of the female body in the field of sculptural art and in that of sacred dance, both of them being connected with the highlighting of the female beauty, grace, warmth and sensuousness inherent in the moderate Kaula doctrines fostered by the Somavaṁśī monarchs.

It is not known whether the *alasa-kanyās* (indolent damsels) depicted virtually everywhere on the walls of Orissan temples, and in particular of the ones belonging to the Somavaṁśī and Gaṅga periods — represent celestial figures or rather a mere ideal of female beauty symbolising, among other things, fertility and auspiciousness. It is, at any rate, evident that these female figures dominate the decorative programme of the Orissan temples erected in the middle medieval period (tenth-thirteenth centuries AD) with a profusion that is not seen in any other area of India. The *alasa-kanyā* images of the Somavaṁśī period can be numbered among the loveliest creations of Orissan art and have few rivals in the whole gamut of

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[266] M. Biardeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-1.

Indian sculpture so far as their beauty is concerned. The most noticeable feature of these images is the so-called 'Somavaṁśī smile' lighting up their faces with a soft and warm trait.[267]

As synthesised by D. Mitra,

> [in the most important Śaiva temples erected by the Somavaṁśīs], where we meet with a great profusion of delicately-modelled urban females in various flexible and captivating poses and luxurious moods, art becomes sensuous and sophisticated, yet the appeal is immediate and overwhelming. The slim and supple figures, high in relief, emerge out of the body of the temple, the body itself often elegantly embellished with floral, vegetal and geometric motifs, and have an amplitude of free movement. Rich in the warmth of human emotions the slender and vivacious *kanyās*, conscious of their beauty and with exquisite and seductive charm, and often with an ineffable smile, are shown in various roles like fondling a child, playing with pet birds, taking out anklets so that she may go out unheard, wearing a *śāṭī*, dancing, playing on musical instruments, making her toilet, holding branches of trees or flowers, standing by the side of a door, amorous in company of her beloved and in other actions of similar nature.[268]

The power of love, deified in accordance with the Kaula religious perspective, shines through the postures, expressions, hand gestures and movements displayed by these *alasa-kanyās*. Their seductiveness and charm was thought to bring the devotees close to Mahāmāyā or Mahāvidyā, the most metaphysical among the concepts underlying Śakti-worship. Although they were not revered as goddesses, they were considered to be the symbols of the immanence of Śakti in the manifested world and, above all, in woman. Therefore, whatever be the Hindu creed which an Orissan temple is affiliated to, the profuse depiction of *alasa-kanyās* on its walls can be always considered to signify the veneration of the female principle as the highest active principle in the universe, a conception borrowed by the medieval Hindu artists from the Śakti cult widespread all over Orissa from the hoary past.

THE DEVADĀSĪ TRADITION

The introduction, during the Somavaṁśī epoch, of the female temple dancers known as *devadāsīs* (the maid-servants of God), under whose care were put some sacred services in some eminent Śaiva shrines of Orissa, had possibly a religious meaning analogous to the sculptural representation of *alasa-kanyās* on the walls of the same class of shrines, namely, exalting the female beauty, grace and sensuousness as a device for glorifying the universal Śakti.

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[267] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, pp. 1149-52.

[268] D. Mitra, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-5.

The Brahmeśvara temple inscription of Kolavatī, mother of king Udyotakeśarī of the Somavaṁśī dynasty, which can be assigned to AD 1065, contains the earliest references to the dedication of dancing girls to a Śaiva shrine in Bhubaneswar and to the introduction of Oḍissi music and dance in the service pattern of the temple. It is, furthermore, known that, in a slightly later period, handsome female temple dancers were permanently employed by king Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga in the services of the Śaiva temple of Madhukeśvara at Mukhaliṅgam, which was probably the then capital of the Eastern Gaṅga dynasty. The inscriptions of Śobhaneśvara temple at Niali and Megheśvara temple at Bhubaneswar, dating from the closing part of the twelfth century AD, testify to the continuance of the custom of offering *devadāsīs* to Śaiva temples up to the Imperial Gaṅga period.[269] The sculptural representation of dancing girls in seductive poses on the outer walls of the Mukteśvara, Brahmeśvara, Rājarāṇī and Liṅgarāja temples testify to the large popularity of *devadāsīs* at Bhubaneswar in the tenth-eleventh centuries.

Although it is difficult to ascertain whether the *devadāsīs* of the Somavaṁśī period acted as sacred prostitutes or not, they may be supposed to have done so in consideration of the prevalence of such a custom in South India in the same historical period. The functioning of *devadāsīs* as sacred prostitutes was particularly frequent in the Tamil country: just to give an instance of this, some inscriptions dating from the eleventh century AD reveal that the great Bṛhadīśvara temple of Thanjavur (Tanjore), erected by the Cola king Rājarāja (*ca.* AD 985-1014), had at its command hundreds of damsels for the services of Śiva, all of them enjoying a high social status.[270] In this connection, it cannot be excluded that the ancient South Indian institution of sacred prostitution may have influenced in those days the socio-religious customs in Orissa. The Somavaṁśī kingdom is known to have been invaded and thrown into confusion, sometime in the first quarter of the eleventh century AD, by the armies of the Cola king Rājendra I (*ca.* AD 1014-44), who marched victoriously up to Bengal to attack and defeat there the powerful Pāla monarchs.[271] In the very same period, the Cola empire stretched as far as the southern frontier of Orissa and perhaps, after the aforesaid historical events, influenced to some extent the Somavaṁśī kingdom with its socio-religious institutions, including the custom of offering *devadāsīs* to Śaiva temples.

According to J. Gonda the exercise of sacred prostitution by the *devadāsīs* was a half-religious function whose origins are to be traced back to the incorporation of Śākta ideals into medieval Śaivism. These figures of dancer-prostitutes were believed to irradiate joy and bestow prosperity thanks to the magical power inherent in their sexuality, which was regarded as an earthly reflex of the energy of the supreme Śakti. Their role was, thus, conceptually akin to that of the *yoginīs* of the Kaula tradition, with the important difference that the *devadāsīs*, unlike the *yoginīs*, did not operate in an esoteric context and were generally approachable by any common devotee who wished to enjoy them. Sexual intercourse with a dancer-prostitute attached to a Śaiva temple — held, of course, outside the premises of the temple itself — was experienced as a magico-mystic union with the divinity of life, love and fecundity, that is, Pārvatī. The Orissan *devadāsīs*, however, were mainly entrusted with religious services such as the maintenance of the temple, the celebration of ceremonies, the care of sacred lamps, and especially the holy functions consisting of dance, songs and drama. They were normally donated to the temple by their parents through the medium of a king or of a member of the royal family. Their sacred dance representation was connected with the mythical dance of Śiva, performed by that great god in the presence of his divine spouse Pārvatī as a *līlā* (game) by virtue of which he, the Supreme Yogin, was imagined to come into touch with the manifested world, embodied by Pārvatī.[272] A *devadāsī*, while identifying herself with pure motion, released and revealed the divine element she was believed to contain in her own person, thus, becoming a simple reflex of the cosmic dance through which Śiva imparts the motion of eternal transformation to the universe. She, thus, became the living symbol of the universal power of the god, i.e., of Śakti herself.

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[269] H.C. Das, *art cit.*, pp. 122-3.

[270] J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-7.

[271] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-9; A. Daniélou, *Storia dell'India*, pp. 172-3.

A *devadāsī* was generally 'given in marriage' in a ritual way to the particular manifestation of Śiva (a *liṅga* or an anthropomorphic image) venerated in the temple she was donated to. As a consequence of this sacred wedding, she gained an unlimited sexual freedom.[273] In this last connection, it can be conjectured that the iconographic representation of a nude female in a hieratic attitude straddling a Śiva-*liṅga* (and, in certain examples, making her *yoni* contact with it), particularly frequent in the Śaiva temples of Orissa starting from the tenth century AD,[274] may symbolise, among other things, the *devadāsī*'s sacred union with Śiva. Also the priestesses of Ishtar in ancient Babylon and those of Aphrodite in the ancient Greek colonies in Sicily were ritually married to a god, which fact granted them an unlimited sexual freedom.[275]

The custom of offering dancing maidens to a temple was adopted in the Gaṅga and Sūryavaṁśī epochs in a Vaiṣṇavite context as well. This was a great innovation in the ritualistic pattern observed at the Vaiṣṇava shrines of Orissa. The Gaṅgas added a dancing hall (*nāṭa-mandira*) to all the important Śaiva, Śākta, Vaiṣṇava and Saura temples of Orissa in order to stage the *devadāsīs*' performances of sacred dance therein. The *devadāsī* tradition continued to be patronised by the later rulers of the Orissan empire till the Sūryavaṁśī

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[272] J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[273] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[274] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, pp. 1157-8.

[275] P. Filippani-Ronconi, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

Gajapati monarch Pratāparudradeva (AD 1497-1540) made the singing of the *Gītagovinda*, the famous mystic-erotic Sanskrit poem by Jayadeva (twelfth century AD), a compulsory ritualistic performance in the temple of Jagannātha at Puri.[276] The episodes from this poem were staged in the premises of Jagannātha temple in the presence of the Lord himself (identified with Kṛṣṇa) by the *devadāsīs* permanently attached to the temple complex. But this already forms the argument of the next section of this chapter.

Cult syncreticism in the Gaṅga and Sūryavaṁśī periods

The so-called Imperial Gaṅgas of Kaliṅga were the dynastic successors of the Early Gaṅgas, who ruled over the northern coastal belt of Andhra Pradesh starting from the closing part of the fifth century AD. Beginning from the tenth century AD the monarchs of this dynasty are also known as Greater Gaṅgas, while from the reign of Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga (AD 1078-1150), who in around AD 1110 conquered what remained of the weakened Somavaṁśī kingdom of Orissa, they are known as Imperial Gaṅgas. The empire created by Coḍagaṅga in the course of his long reign extended from the Godavari in the south to the Ganges in the north. This king shifted his capital from Kaliṅganagara (modern Mukhaliṅgam in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh) to Vārāṇasī Kataka (the modern Cuttack), situated in a central and strategic position in the heart of his newly-built empire. The Gaṅgas, thus, became Oriyās, adopting the Oriyā customs and language and patronising the Kaliṅga School of Art and Architecture, the regional religious traditions and Oriyā literature. They ruled over Orissa for more than three centuries till *ca.* AD 1434, when their throne was usurped by Kapilendradeva, the founder of the Sūryavaṁśī or Gajapati imperial dynasty of Kaliṅga.[277]

Following the tradition of his forefathers the Eastern Gaṅgas, Coḍagaṅga was initially Śaivite, but after he had occupied Orissa he shifted his loyalty to Vaiṣṇavism, whose ascent in the country had begun in the later part of the Somavaṁśī age. He, thus, became an ardent devotee of Lord Jagannātha, whose temple at Puri, erected by the Somavaṁśī kings on a pre-existing sanctuary dating back to the Bhauma-kara epoch (perhaps a Tāntric Buddhist one), was entirely rebuilt and fairly enlarged by him with the addition of many subsidiary shrines dedicated to a plethora of male and female deities belonging to the Brāhmaṇical pantheon, so that it reached its present dimensions and splendour. From the time of Coḍagaṅga onwards Lord Jagannātha was regarded as the national deity (*rāṣṭra-devatā*) of the Orissan empire, and his far-famed temple at Puri was gradually turned into a pan-Indian Vaiṣṇavite pilgrimage centre.[278]

Although the Imperial Gaṅgas were the staunch devotees of Lord Jagannātha, they practised an eclectic and tolerant religious policy with patronising Śaivism and Śāktism too. They were induced to act so due to the age-old rootedness of the allied cults of Śiva and Śakti in the religious traditions of Orissa. A number of inscriptions dating from the Imperial Gaṅga period testify to the devotion of the monarchs, their officers or their subjects to Śaivite and Śākta deities.[279] Some of the Gaṅga emperors styled themselves as *Paramamaheśvara* or as *Durgāputra*, with this showing their religious eclecticism.[280] Many temples dedicated to Śiva, the most imposing among which are found at Bhubaneswar, Jajpur, Banpur, Vishnupur, Niali, Garudipanchana and on the Kapilas Hill, were erected in that period with the patronisation of the Gaṅga monarchs or of their feudatories. As regards Śāktism, the important shrines dedicated by the Gaṅga monarchs to the Goddess as an independent cult deity are a brick temple at Motia in the Prachi Valley, whose enshrined deity is a four-armed Mahiṣamardinī, and the temple of Gaṅgeśvarī at Beyalisbati near Konarak, (*fig.* 56) which represents the latest example of a *khākharā deul* to be found in Orissa if one leaves out of consideration the still later temple of Nārāyaṇī in the forest near Balugaon in Ganjam district, built by employing the *khākharā* order at a time (*ca.* sixteenth century AD) when the Kaliṅga School of Art and Architecture had long since declined.

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[276] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

[277] *Ibid.*, pp. 49 and 152-5.

[278] *Ibid.*, pp. 338-40.

As a matter of fact, in the course of the Gaṅga epoch all of the different Hindu creed commingled in the national cult of Jagannātha, which, thus, assumed by degrees a pan-Indian character. A worship system generally known as *Pañcadevatā-upāsanā* (adoration of the five divinities of the traditional Hindu pentad, namely, Viṣṇu-Śiva-Śakti-Sūrya-Gaṇapati) was adopted in this epoch in Orissa parallel to the ascent of the syncretistic cult of Jagannātha, which included within its fold the adoration of most of the deities of the Hindu pantheon. The most authoritative historian of Orissa, K.C. Panigrahi, synthesises this process with the following considerations:

> Before the commencement of the Gaṅga period Śaivism, Śāktism and Vaiṣṇavism were the three main cults which existed side by side in Orissa, each preaching its own superiority, but at no time either in theory or practice, losing its separate entity. In the Gaṅga period there were attempts to amalgamate them into one form of religion that contained the principles of each, but yet exclusively represented none. The *pīṭhas* or shrines continued to bear distinct names in accordance with the cults of their origin. Purī, Bhuvaneśvara, Koṇārka, Mahāvināyaka and Virajā or Jājpur, the traditional five *pīṭhas* representing five distinct cults, continued to be respectively termed as Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Saura, Gāṇapatya and Śākta centres, but the form of worship that came into vogue in them became essentially a cosmopolitan one. The movement aimed

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[279] H.C. Das, 'Temples of Orissa and Their Socio-Religious Significance', in Id., ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 163.

[280] Id., 'Religions of Orissa', p. 140.

at a synthesis of cults and sects by adopting principles not merely from the different cults of Hinduism, but from Buddhism, Jainism and from the primitive cults that were practised by the primitive people of Orissa. The cult of Jagannātha embodies all these diverse elements and affords the best example of this synthesis.

THE GAṄGAS AND ŚĀKTISM

The Gaṅga monarchs are depicted in some Oriyā traditions as the great opponents of independent Śāktism. A tradition recorded in the *Mādaḷā Pāñji*, the chronicle of the temple of Jagannātha at Puri, even states that Coḍagaṅga banished all goddesses from Orissa. Another tradition recorded in a copy of the same chronicle recovered from Berhampur indicates that Coḍagaṅga was antagonistic to all Śākta images except a few like Virajā of Jajpur, this goddess being considered to be part of the system of *Pañcadevatā-upāsanā* fostered by the Gaṅgas themselves.[282] An hostility towards the extreme forms of Śākta-Tantrism, as earlier indicated, had already marked the reign of the Somavaṁśīs, but the case of the Gaṅgas appears different: this dynasty, in fact, seemingly endeavoured to eradicate Śāktism as an independent form of religion in its own dominions and to make it subservient to the major male-oriented Hindu cults, which were in their turn made subservient to the national cult of Jagannātha.

The prevalent trend of Devī-worship during the Imperial Gaṅga period was to provide all male divinities with female consorts, whose cult icons were enshrined in minor temples built in the compound of each great Orissan temple dedicated to a Hindu god. Most probably, the Gaṅgas intended this way to show the people their religious catholicity making room for Śakti cult in the premises of the sanctuaries consecrated to the most eminent 'Vaiṣṇavised' male divinities (Jagannātha at Puri, Harihara at Bhubaneswar, Sūrya at Konarak, etc.) and, at the same time, to deny the role of the Devī as an independent cult heroine, which was evidently considered by them as a menace to the development of Orissan Hinduism into a national form of religion pivoted upon the all-inclusive cult of Jagannātha. Thus, the Gaṅga monarchs erected some remarkable shrines dedicated to the consort goddesses of the presiding gods of the main *tīrthas* or *kṣetras* of Orissa. A similar tradition was also known in the Cola empire starting from about the eleventh century AD, as is evident from some Cola inscriptions referring to the erection of separate shrines for Amman (Pārvatī) near the main cult edifice of each Śaiva temple complex. Also in South India, like in Orissa, these consort-goddess shrines are not coeval with the main sanctum, rather they are later additions made in order to represent the dual aspect of Śiva-Śakti.[283] Since the Gaṅgas ruled originally over the

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[281] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

[282] *Ibid.*, p. 334.

[283] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 106; T. V. Mahalingam, *art. cit.*, pp. 30-1.

northern coastal belt of Andhra Pradesh, bordering to the south upon the Cola empire, it is not unlikely that this tradition was borrowed by them by their Cola neighbours.

The Gaṅgas built an imposing shrine for the worship of Śiva's consort Pārvatī, second in magnitude only to the main temple itself, in the Liṅgarāja temple complex at Bhubaneswar (where other Śākta shrines, dedicated to the goddesses Gopālinī and Sāvitrī, had been most likely already built by the last Somavaṁśī kings). The temple (*fig.* 55) was consecrated to Pārvatī in her form as Annapūrṇā ('the-Giver-of-Food-and Plenty' or 'the-Full-of-Nourishment'), the vegetable-bestowing and food-giving aspect of the Devī representing the latter's power of giving plentiful crops. This aspect of Pārvatī is very similar, in its essence, to the concept of Lakṣmī, the goddess of abundance, whose cult overpoweringly emerged in Orissa starting from the twelfth century AD owing to the spread of Vaiṣṇavism. The temple of Pārvatī in the Liṅgarāja compound cannot be later than AD 1274, as is demonstrated by an inscription, bearing that date and referring to the worship of goddess Umā (Pārvatī), which is engraved near the temple itself.[284] Since the presiding deity of Ekāmra *kṣetra* (Bhubaneswar), starting from the beginning of the Gaṅga epoch, was conceived as Harihara (half-Śiva and half-Viṣṇu), the choice of goddess Umā/Pārvatī/Annapūrṇā as Lord Liṅgarāja's consort appears appropriate in view of her propinquity to the functions embodied by goddess Lakṣmī in the Vaiṣṇava perspective. The great importance of the role being played by Lakṣmī in the context of Harihara cult at Bhubaneswar is also evinced by the fact that, on the occasion of the *Aśokāṣṭamī* car festival, being yearly held in the great temple town in the month of Caitra (March-April), Lord Liṅgarāja's processional image, representing the god in his aspect as Candraśekhara (the Moon-Crested), is accompanied in the car by Lakṣmī, i.e., the consort of Viṣnu, rather than by Pārvatī, Śiva's legitimate consort. Some Purāṇic accounts, having most likely originated in a Vaiṣṇava ambit, trace the origin of the festival back to the worship of the great Goddess as performed by Rāma before his final struggle with Rāvaṇa, with this suggesting a mixed, Śākta-Vaiṣṇava influence on this holy function.[285]

At the holy Śrī *kṣetra* of Puri, whose presiding deity was Viṣṇu/Jagannātha, the emperor Coḍagaṅga erected a fine subsidiary shrine for the worship of Lakṣmī, regarded as the consort of that god.[286] This shrine, which in point of importance is only next to the main temple, soon exceeded in popularity the purely Śākta-Tāntric shrine of goddess Vimalā, worshipped at Śrī *kṣetra* from at least the Bhauma-kara epoch (although the temple to her dedicated was subsequently rebuilt first by the Somavaṁśīs and, thereafter, again by the Gaṅgas).[287] The temples of Lakṣmī and Vimalā at Puri as well as that of Pārvatī at Bhubaneswar are all provided with a three-chambered porch like the temples of the male deities in whose compounds they are respectively located. Each of them, therefore, includes a *nāṭa-mandira* (dancing hall) inside which sacred dance representations performed by the temple *devadāsīs* were no doubt staged on ceremonial occasions under the Gaṅga and the Gajapati rule. It can be maintained, on the whole, that the three goddess-shrines at issue were the places at which the *bhakti* movement, patronised by the Gaṅga monarchs with special emphasis on the Vaiṣṇavite side, met with the age-old Śākta-Tāntric traditions of Orissa.

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[284] B.V. Nath, 'The Pārvatī Temple Inscription at Bhubaneswar', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. III, No. 3, pp. 146-9.

[285] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[286] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

[287] H.C. Das, *art. cit.*, p. 133; K.N. Mahapatra, 'Antiquities of Jagannātha-Puri as a Place of Pilgrimage', →

The Śākta-Tāntric influence is, rather paradoxically, much more noticed in the daily rituals of Jagannātha temple than in those of Liṅgarāja temple. The cult image of Jagannātha is, for instance, placed on a *śrīcakra-yantra* (a symbol of the Mahādevī) and is worshipped in the *bīja-mantra KLĪṀ* (termed by tradition as *kāma-bīja*, the 'seed of desire'), which represents the procreative power of the universal Śakti. This ritualistic tradition may find an explanation in the conceptual link between the role of the Mahādevī and that of Kṛṣṇa (with whom Jagannātha is identified) as demon-slayers.[288] It can be added to this that the Kaula adepts of medieval Orissa considered Jagannātha as another form of Dakṣiṇa Kālikā. According to a tradition, this mode of worship would have been established by Śaṅkarācārya himself when he visited Puri. The *Saudarśinī Vāmadeva Saṁhitā*, a Tāntric work which is tentatively attributed to the disciple of Śaṅkarācārya, Padmapādācārya, states that Jagannātha is the very self of Dakṣiṇa Kālikā.[289] Again in this connection, the sectarian Śākta devotees of Orissa, who still today regard goddess Vimalā as the real presiding deity of Śrī *kṣetra*, recognise Puri as one of the traditional Śākta *pīṭhas* where Vimalā, in accordance with what is stated in many Śākta-Tāntric works, acts as Bhairavī and Jagannātha, merely as her Bhairava.[290] Even the *pañca-makāra* mode of worship of *vāmācāra* Tantrism has been incorporated in a symbolic way into the ritualistic pattern followed at Jagannātha temple: the well-known 'five M's' (fish, meat, wine, grain and sexual intercourse) have been, in fact, replaced here by vegetable offerings.[291] Śākta-Tāntric features are attached to the very figure of goddess Subhadrā, who forms an integral part of the Jagannātha Trinity. It will, therefore, appear clear that an amalgamation of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Śāktism

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→ *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. III, No. 1, p. 14; N.K. Sahu, 'History of Kośala and the Somavaṁśīs of Utkala', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. III, No. 3, p. 134; K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

[288] S.C. Mohapatra, 'Special Features of Sri Jagannath and Sriksetra', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, pp. 48-9; A. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, pp. 342-3.

[289] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, p. XIX.

[290] *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts of Orissa,* vol. V: Tantra Manuscripts, compiled by M.P. Dash, p. XVIII.

[291] K.S. Behera, 'The Evolution of Śakti Cult at Jajpur, Bhubaneswar and Puri', pp. 84-5.

under the common denominator of Tantrism is found in the culture of Jagannātha as a result of the syncretistic religious policy first promoted by the Gaṅga emperors.

At the Arka *kṣetra* of Konarak, where the huge and magnificent Sūrya Deul erected by the Gaṅga emperor Nṛsiṁhadeva I (AD 1238-64) stands in half-ruined conditions not far from the seashore, the female counterpart of the presiding god (THE SUN) was Chāyā, whose collapsed shrine is still visible to the south-west of the main temple.

In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (Book III, Ch. 2) goddess Chāyā (the Shade) is described as the shadow of Sañjā, the Sun's wife. She was given by Sañjā to her husband as his handmaid before the former repaired to the forest to practise austerity in order to become able to endure the Sun's fervour. The Sun supposed Chāyā to be his wife and had three children from her. He came to know the truth only when Chāyā revealed it to him.[292]

The temple of Chāyā at Konarak, of which only the lower portion has survived, dates back to the later Somavaṁśī period (*ca.* early twelfth century AD). As it can be inferred from the presence of Sūrya images in its *pārśva-devatā* niches, the temple was, in all likelihood, originally consecrated to the Sun, and was converted into the shrine of the Sun's consort (in accordance with the religious policy of the Gaṅgas) only when the much more imposing Sūrya Deul was erected by king Nṛsiṁhadeva I of the Gaṅga dynasty.[293] In the Gaṅga and Sūryavaṁśī periods the presiding deity of Chāyā temple was possibly represented by the ten-armed image of goddess Mahāgāyatrī (one of the *śaktis* of the Sun god) reproduced in an old palm-leaf manuscript studied by A. Boner. According to the same (doubtful) source, this goddess image would have been accompanied in the temple sanctum by the images of two other *śaktis* of Sūrya, i.e., Sāvitrī and Sarasvatī.[294] An historical legend runs that the temple was destroyed in around AD 1568 by the Muslim invaders led by Kālāpahār.

Other instances of the absorption of the image and worship of the Devī into the male-dominated project of the temples built during the Imperial Gaṅga period are the following:

(a) The Vaiṣṇava Trinity enshrined in the sanctum of the temple of Ananta-Vāsudeva at Bhubaneswar (AD 1278), formed by the cult icons of Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and Ekānaṁśā. The image of Ekānaṁśā/Subhadrā, conceived as the younger sister of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma as per the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṁśa*,[295] conforms here to the iconography of Pārvatī and is smaller in size than those of the two male deities flanking her on each side. The same iconographic features are noticed in the trio of deities presiding over Ananteśvara temple in the Liṅgarāja complex, representing another such Vaiṣṇava Trinity. In either temple, the image of Ekānaṁśā was perhaps originally placed in the *jagamohana* and worshipped as Lakṣmī. The two Ekānaṁśā images in question appear to have been incorporated into a Vaiṣṇava Trinity only in around the fourteenth century AD, when the cult of Jagannātha, which gave inspiration to the arrangement of the Vaiṣṇavite cult icons as a trio formed by two 'brothers' and one 'sister', acquired great importance in Bhubaneswar.[296]

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[292] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, tr. and comm. by H.H. Wilson, pp. 214-5.

[293] D. Mitra, *Koṇārak*, 2nd edn., New Delhi, 1976, p. 95; T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, pp. 407-10.

[294] A. Boner, S.R. Sharma and R.P. Das, *New Light on the Sun Temple at Konārak*, Varanasi, 1972, p. 32 and Pl. 99.

[295] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 502.

(b) The so-called images of Durgā-Mādhava, depicting Lord Jagannātha, a Śiva-*liṅga* and Mahiṣamardinī side by side while being worshipped by a king. Two such syncretistic images are to be found in the Sun temple at Konarak, while a third one, recovered from Konarak, is now preserved in the National Museum of New Delhi. A fourth and probably later image belonging to the same class is placed in the offering-hall (*bhoga-maṇḍapa*) of Jagannātha temple at Puri. The conjoint worship of Durgā, Viṣṇu (in Jagannātha form) and Śiva is a peculiar feature of later medieval Orissan Vaiṣṇavism, reflecting the efforts made by the Gaṅgas to amalgamate the three main Hindu cults (Śaivism, Śāktism and Vaiṣṇavism) into one national form of religion.[297] Under the Sūryavaṁśī rule this iconographic motif was changed by eliminating the already small image of a Śiva-*liṅga* from the sculptural composition, with this giving rise to the Durgā-Mādhava motif proper. The Sūryavaṁśīs and their successors the Bhois had among their official emblems the image of Durgā with Jagannātha, while shrines dedicated to the juxtaposed deities are found in many a king's palace in Puri or elsewhere. This new form of cult was, no doubt, connected with Oriyā nationalism and militarism: the union of the powers of the Devī and of Jagannātha, the two royal tutelary deities of Orissa *par excellence*, was, in fact, meant to support the power of the emperors of Orissa.[298]

(c) The syncretistic worship of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, which gained some popularity in coastal Orissa during the Gaṅga period. Goddess Lakṣmī is depicted in this class of images as being seated on her consort's left thigh, namely, on the same side (the left one) usually occupied by Pārvatī in the Ardhanārīśvara and Umā-maheśvara images of Śaivism. Lakṣmī, in this case, is considered to form one divine entity with Viṣṇu, although her reduced size indicates her subordination to her consort. The two deities are generally depicted as a smiling happy couple and as embracing each other. Some fine examples of a Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa image are still worshipped at Chaurasi in the

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[296] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, pp. 1133-5.

[297] K.C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 115; T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, pp. 1065 and 1133.

[298] D.N. Pathy, 'Orissan Painting', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 228.

Prachi Valley, at Laxmisagar in the outskirts of Bhubaneswar and in a subsidiary shrine lying in the premises of Liṅgarāja temple. All of these cult icons date back to the Gaṅga epoch. Sometimes Viṣṇu appears in his Nṛsiṁha or Varāha forms, giving origin to the sub-classes of images termed as Lakṣmī-Nṛsiṁha and Lakṣmī-Varāha respectively. There are few Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa images in Orissa, possibly because the Śākta-Vaiṣṇava syncretistic cult in question, promoted by the Gaṅga monarchs, never captured the minds of the devotees in a mass scale.[299]

(d) The appearance of the images of the female counterparts of the *dikpālas* (Regents of the Directions) in the decorative programme of the temples built after the temple of Ananta-Vāsudeva at Bhubaneswar (AD 1278). The images of these female deities are placed below those of their male counterparts at the eight quarters of the temple spire, with this indicating their subordination to the *dikpālas*. Such an art development appears to be conceptually connected with the aforesaid usage, diffused in Orissa during the Gaṅga epoch, of erecting a subsidiary shrine for the *śakti* of the main god in the premises of the most eminent Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Saura temples. In either case, indeed, the *śaktis* are placed in a subordinate position compared with that of the male deities with whom they are associated.[300]

To sum up, the Gaṅga period witnessed a full integration of the female divine principle with the male one in the cult sphere. Syncretistic cults, in which the Śākta element was invariably assigned a subsidiary role, became the norm in Orissa in that period. The removal of the most distinctive and explicit Śākta-Tāntric elements from the religious culture of the Oriyā people was attained by the Gaṅga monarchs by also reducing the erotic sculptural motifs carved on all Hindu temples to a routine device without any functional use, having but a talismanic and auspicious meaning for the artisans and the worshippers. Moreover, the specifically Śākta-Tāntric *khākharā* order of temple architecture, used in former epochs to mark the Śākta-Tāntric nature of the temple, was virtually abolished, and the standardisation of the architectural matrix of all Devī temples with the *rekha-piḍhā* order, used long since in Orissa to build all the shrines dedicated to male divinities, became the rule in the Gaṅga empire.

Owing to the triumph of Vaiṣṇavism in Orissa in the initial part of the Gaṅga epoch, Śakti cult was turned, in essence, into a *bhakti*-based form of temple worship in which the Śakti was first of all conceived as the power of illusion, preservation and prosperity inherent in Viṣṇu. The Mahādevī' functions, being greatly assimilated to those of Viṣṇu's consort Lakṣmī, who is primarily the goddess of good fortune, came to be more determined by her supposed proximity to the daily urges of the common man than by the original Tāntric-yogic content of Śakti cult.[301] The much diminished frequency in the erection of independent Śākta shrines in the Imperial Gaṅga period in comparison with the previous epochs of Orissan history may be explained with the substantial assimilation of the figure of the Devī into that of Lakṣmī, a goddess who, as it is well known, can never be worshipped alone in a temple of her own. The role of the great Goddess as the bestower of crops and food, expressed at best by Lakṣmī, was increasingly highlighted in this epoch, during which the Vaiṣṇava-dominated *bhakti* movement gradually superimposed the Tāntric spirituality rooted in all classess of the Oriyā population.

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[299] H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', pp. 125-6.

[300] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

The origin of a large number of agricultural religious festivals having a Śākta matrix, but nevertheless centring round the non-Tāntric worship of Lakṣmī, can be traced back in Orissa to the Gaṅga epoch. Finally, the exaltation of Lakṣmī's function as the protectress of *dharma* brought about a change in the position of woman in the Oriyā society: the records of the time,[302] indeed, greatly emphasise the role of women as devoted wives, nurturing mothers, bearers of soldiers and observant *bhakta*s in contrast with the exaltation of the feminine sexual power which had characterised the previous epochs. This marked the definitive triumph of the patriarchal ideals fostered by the Vaiṣṇavas over the age-old matriarchal ideals of pristine Śāktism.

TUTELARY GODDESSES OF FORTS

Orissa has a glorious military history that is still today witnessed by the extensive ruins of forts built throughout the State during the medieval period to face either the attacks of the Muslims and those of the rival Hindu powers of the Deccan. In the course of their three-century domination over Orissa the Gaṅga monarchs built a series of forts situated at strategic points from the Godavari in the south to the Ganges in the north. These military establishments played a vital role in the defence of the territory of Orissa starting from the thirteenth century AD, when the sultans of Bengal began their attempts to invade the Gaṅga empire. Each of such forts, having now for the most part collapsed, was, in all likelihood, associated in times past with a tutelary goddess of its own. This can be evinced by the presence, amidst the ruins of many of these structures or in their immediate proximity, of the cult icon of a Hindu goddess or of the remains of a Śākta shrine. Here a concise list of the most important among such medieval relics is provided.

(a) In front of the main gate of the ruined fort of Bualigarh, situated in the dense jungle near the village of Dalua on the road from Chandaka to Khurda (Puri district), a heap of stones has been tentatively identified with the remains of a temple dedicated to a goddess. The fort in question was probably built by Coḍagaṅga for the temporary residence of his soldiers when they needed to remain concealed in the jungle.[303]

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[301] K.V. Soundara Rajan, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-5.

[302] H.C. Das, 'Socio-Cultural Life during the Rule of Imperial Gaṅgas', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXVII, Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, pp. 66-7.

(b) Outside the Gaṅga fort of Teligarh, located near the Dhanamandala railway station in Cuttack district, the broken image of an unidentified goddess riding on a recumbent human body is presently worshipped in a temple built with stones carried there from the fort. This Śākta-Tāntric goddess may have been enshrined in the past within a cult edifice lying in the premises of the fort itself.[304]

(c) Inside the old fort of Amanakuda near Niali in the Prachi Valley, a terrific twelve-armed image of Mahiṣamardinī, dating from the early Gaṅga period, testifies to the prevalence of the Śākta-Tāntric form of worship in the military establishments of that epoch.[305]

(d) An image identified as Śivānī, which probably belonged to a set of *mātṛkās* dating from *ca.* the eleventh-twelfth centuries AD, presently acts as *grāma-devatā* in the village of Sisupalgarh near Bhubaneswar.[306] During the Imperial Gaṅga period the site, covering the ancient area of Kaliṅganagara (the capital city of king Khāravela), was occupied by a fort. The supposed set of Saptamātṛkās, to which the Śivānī image at issue would have belonged, might well have served in the past as the collective presiding deity of that fort.

(e) The shrine of goddess Ambikā, the tutelary deity of the city of Baripada in Mayurbhanj district, is located near the remains of a medieval mud fort built by the old rulers of the area, the Bhañjas, at a time when the foundation of that city was still to come.[307] The attributes wielded by the goddess — disk, conch and mace according to the description furnished by the local priests — are indicative of a strong Vaiṣṇavite influence on this shrine. From this circumstance it may be inferred that the image at issue cannot have been installed in the temple prior to the accession to power of the Imperial Gaṅgas, who were the great patronisers of Vaiṣṇavism in Orissa. Goddess Ambikā may, thus, have been in the origin the presiding deity of the fort of Baripada, built most likely by the Bhañjas at the time when they became the feudatories of the Gaṅga monarchs in the Mayurbhanj region. The role played by this goddess as the protectress of the local people must have been very important in such a region as the Mayurbhanj one, which in those days bordered on the territories ruled over by the Muslims of Bengal.

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[303] P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report, Vol. I: From 1971 to 1974-75*, p. 5; R. P. Mohapatra, *art. cit.*, p. 126.

[304] P.K. Ray, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[305] Id., ed., *Archaeological Survey Report 1974-75: Prachi Valley*, pp. 2 and 29.

[306] A. Das, 'Some New Facts about Sisupalgarh', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XV, Nos. 1 and 2, pp. 56-9.

[307] N. Senapati and N.K. Sahu, eds., *Mayurbhanj District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1967, pp. 56 and 463-4.

(f) The fort of Raibania, built by the Gaṅgas on the route from Orissa to Bengal near the present boundary line between the two States, had as its presiding deity goddess Jayacaṇḍī, represented by a rectangular piece of stone. This circumstance suggests that the goddess of Raibania was originally a folk goddess subsequently accepted as the protectress of the fort on account of her fame among the local people. Another goddess represented in aniconic form, called Gaḍacaṇḍī, was worshipped in by-gone days as the tutelary deity of the fort of Amarda in Baleswar district. In the same district other goddesses, called Caṇḍī, Durgā, Vana-Durgā, Kanaka-Durgā, etc., acted in the past as the presiding deities of different forts.[308]

(g) A goddess known as Cuḍaṅga Dariāṇī was installed as the presiding deity of the fort of Sarangagada on the river Kathjodi by Coḍagaṅga, who occupied and remodelled the fort in question.

(h) The most celebrated tutelary goddess of an old Gaṅga fort is the so-called Cuttack Caṇḍī, whose representative icon was worshipped inside the fort of Barabati at Cuttack until the latter was half-demolished by the Muslim invaders in the sixteenth century AD. The fort, built by king Anaṅgabhīmadeva III, was known as Abhinava Vārāṇasī Kaṭaka in that the earlier Viḍāṇāsī Kaṭaka, built by Coḍagaṅga after he had shifted his capital here from the northern Andhra region in order to better meet the strategic needs of his newly-built empire, was ruined and devastated by flood. Although the present Cuttack Caṇḍī temple is of modern origin, the original cult icon of the goddess, assignable to the twelfth century AD and locally known as Gaḍacaṇḍī, is still preserved within a structure located near the remains of Barabati fort as a witness of Cuttack's past military glory. According to the description of it furnished by the local priests, the image of Cuttack Caṇḍī, which is stated to be a true copy of the original one (kept constantly covered with clothes and, therefore, not inspectionable), represents a four-armed goddess in a standing pose having the lion at her feet. She is stated to hold *śaṅkha* (conch) and *aṅkuśa* (goad for driving elephants) with her upper hands while displaying *varada* (the *mudrā* of the bestowal of boons) and *abhaya* (the *mudrā* of protection from fear) with her lower hands. The presence of *śaṅkha* among the goddess' attributes indicates a Vaiṣṇava influence, which fact appears logical in view of the fact that the Imperial Gaṅgas, as above indicated, were the champions of cult syncreticism in Orissa with Vaiṣṇavism at the apex.

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[308] H.C. Das, 'Religious History of Balasore', pp. 276-7.

The veneration of Devī images as the protectresses or the tutelary deities of fortified military centres can be traced back to the cult of Durgā, whose very name, being associated, as it seems, with the Sanskrit term *durga* (a fort, an inaccessible place), indicates, according to some scholars, that she was originally conceived as a goddess of forts.[309] At any rate, the role of Durgā as a military goddess is well known, so that the above-listed goddesses of Orissa, each acting in the past as the tutelary deity of a fort, can be taken, as a whole, as subsidiary forms of Durgā. The images of Durgā/Caṇḍī, iconic or aniconic in form, which are still today propitiated by the local people near the ruins of several Orissan forts, bespeak the military glory of medieval Kaliṅga and the devotion of the warriors and soldiers of the Gaṅga empire to the great Goddess.

THE SŪRYAVAṀŚĪS AND ŚĀKTISM

The Sūryavaṁśī or Gajapati epoch (*ca.* AD 1435-1540) is the last golden age in Orissan history. The empire founded by Kapilendradeva — a high officer of the Gaṅga army who usurped the throne of Kaliṅga in AD 1435 by a palace plot — embraced the coastal plains of eastern India from the mouth of the Ganges in the north to the river Kaveri in the south. During the reign of Pratāparudradeva, the last Sūryavaṁśī emperor, the Tamilian provinces annexed by Kapilendradeva after his southern campaigns were recaptured by the Vijayanagara empire, the then paramount power of the Deccan; this notwithstanding, the Gajapatis continued to rule over vast tracts of modern Andhra Pradesh until the end of their dynastic rule.[310]

The cult of Jagannātha, which was in the first place, although not exclusively, an expression of the *bhakti* movement of Vaiṣṇavism, influenced in this period all the aspects of intellectual and religious life in Orissa. The increased military power of the Orissan empire brought about in this period the reinforcement of the nationalistic, imperialistic and theocratic ideology according to which the temporal authority of the monarchs of Kaliṅga was a direct emanation of the spiritual authority of Jagannātha. Kapilendradeva, indeed, revived the ideology, first elaborated by the Gaṅgas, of the divine mission of the sovereigns of Kaliṅga as the servants of Jagannātha, who was regarded as the effective overlord of the country. In such a view, the Gajapati emperor was but the first deputy (*rauta*) of the great god. The imperial authority's linkage to Jagannātha cult, used as an *instrumentum regni*, continued till the downfall of the Orissan empire in AD 1568.[311]

The Sūryavaṁśīs did not introduce any new feature into the ritualistic pattern of Śaivism,[312] nor did they so in regard to Śāktism. They, indeed, confined themselves to following the Gaṅga tradition based on religious tolerance and eclecticism. As these monarchs were not great builders like their predecessors, no Śākta temple noticeable from the artistic viewpoint was erected in Orissa under their rule. The emergence of the two *pīṭhas* (seats of goddess-cult) dedicated to two of the Ten Mahāvidyās, that of Śyāmakālī near the old royal palace at Puri and that of Ugratārā at Bushandapur in Puri district is, however, a landmark of independent Śāktism in the Gajapati period. These two *pīṭhas* are connected with the victories of the Gajapati monarchs over the kingdoms of eastern Deccan and as such their presiding goddesses were propitiated with much pomp and grandeur.

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[309] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

[310] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 190 ff.

[311] H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', pp. 135-6.

[312] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

The temple of Śyāmakālī at Puri is the oldest shrine dedicated to Mahāvidyā Kālī in Orissa. The cult image enshrined within the temple sanctum, dating back to the fifteenth century AD, represents a four-armed goddess standing on the bosom of Śiva and engaged in reverse sexual intercourse with him. The goddess holds a sword and severed human head in her left hands while she displays *varada* and *abhaya* with her right hands. She is three-eyed and is surrounded by vultures and jackals. This nicely carved cult icon conforms to the *dhyāna* of Dakṣiṇa Kālī and is worshipped in Tāntric rites.[313]

The representative image of Ugratārā enshrined at Bushandapur, assigned to the fifteenth century AD, is of dark blue complexion, placing her leg on the breast of Śiva who is lying like a corpse on the funeral pyre. The goddess is of short stature, terrible in appearance and dressed in a tiger skin; she is four-armed, three-eyed and wears a garland of severed human heads. This image almost fully conforms to the iconography of Ugratārā as given in the *Tārā Tantra.*[314] The cult of Mahāvidyā Tārā, otherwise known as Ugratārā, was incorporated into Brāhmaṇical Śāktism under the influence of the Tāntric Buddhist cult of Mahācīnatārā (also known as Ugratārā), which was widespread over eastern India during the early medieval period.[315] This goddess was conceived by the Śāktas as a direct emanation of the first of the Mahāvidyās, Kālī. The tradition runs that a fort named Sundajhar once stood at Bushandapur. At the time of Kapilendradeva (AD 1435-67), the founder of the Sūryavaṁśī empire, a great battle between the armies of Orissa and those of the Muslims of the Deccan is stated to have been fought there, on the occasion of which several thousand soldiers would have died on each side. The emperor of Orissa collected, as it seems, one hundred thousand heads of the dead enemies, unearthed them near the fort and built on the site a Tāntric temple consecrated to goddess Ugratārā, who was worshipped since then on as the protectress of the fort in question.[316]

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[313] H.C. Das, 'Iconography of Śākta Divinities', unpublished manuscript.

[314] H.C. Das, 'Brāhmaṇical Tāntric Art of Orissa', p. 129.

[315] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[316] *Vijaya*, Madras and Bhubaneswar, November 1995, p. 30 (in Oriyā).

It is interesting to note that the tradition of the worship of Daśa-Mahāvidyās, originated in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (*ca.* twelfth century AD),[317] did not develop in Orissa, though the first two Mahāvidyās, Kālī and Tārā, were brought to eminence in the country during the Sūryavaṁśī period. The images of Daśa-Mahāvidyās in the temples of Baṭamaṅgalā and Śyāmakālī at Puri, of Maṅgalā at Kakatpur, of Carcikā at Banki, of Khambheśvarī at Sonepur, of Samalei at Sambalpur, etc., are, in fact, of modern origin. These Śākta-Tāntric deities were represented in the temples to give an idea of the Daśa-Mahāvidyā tradition connected with the main enshrined goddesses (*fig*. 34, 35 and 36).

The cult of Lakṣmī — which is essentially a household and rural form of Śakti-worship, having little connection with the community worship in temples — gained a tremendous popularity in Orissa starting from the Sūryavaṁśī period. This goddess, depicted as a model Hindu wife loyal and submissive to her own husband (Viṣṇu), was regarded as the perfect symbol of the prosperity and fertility power associated with the female principle. No trace of Śākta-Tāntric practices is to be found in Lakṣmī cult, so that the pious Oriyā women of the Sūryavaṁśī period could well be considered the humanised forms of goddess Lakṣmī (as is evinced by some records dating from that epoch) without this implying any allusion to the erotic power embodied by the great Goddess, which had been glorified in the earlier Tāntric phases of Orissan Śāktism. The Oriyā women of the Sūryavaṁśī period were regarded as the responsibles for the wealth and prosperity of their family members, for whose benefit they had to perform the daily religious rites properly with a special accent on the propitiation of Lakṣmī. The ideal of womanliness typical of a patriarchal society was, thus, expressed at best in the cult of Lakṣmī.[318]

At any rate, the triumph of the patriarchal ideals typical of Vaiṣṇavism in the later medieval society of Kaliṅga did not cause the disappearance of the mystic-erotic elements typical of Śāktism from the religious horizon of the people. On the contrary, a sex-oriented form of mysticism gradually crept in that period into the very fold of Vaiṣṇavite *bhakti* until the Sūryavaṁśī emperor Pratāparudradeva (AD 1497-1540) made the singing of Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* — the most erotic among the sacred poems relating to Kṛṣṇa's love play with Rādhā and the other *gopīs* — a compulsory ritualistic performance in the premises of Jagannātha temple. The recitation of the *Gītagovinda* by *devadāsīs* with music and dance in the presence of Lord Jagannātha, thus, became a normal ritualistic performance at Puri.[319] The fact is, that in the later Sūryavaṁśī period Lord Jagannātha came to be fully identified with Kṛṣṇa as conceived by the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā sect of Bengal, in the views of which the god's union with Rādhā and the other *gopīs* must be interpreted in a sexual light. The divine 'game of love', the performance of which was attributed to Śiva and Śakti in the previous religio-cultural elaborations of Orissan Hinduism, thus, became by this time a prerogative of Kṛṣṇa and his female associates. In consequence of the increased popularity of the *Gītagovinda* in the Orissan empire in the first half of the sixteenth century AD, the cult of Jagannātha was tinged with sexual symbolism like it had never happened to do in the former epochs. To this one might add that, during Pratāparudradeva's reign, the sexually rather ambiguous system of *gotipuas* (young boys dressed in a female attire) was introduced into the sacred dance representations performed outside the Hindu temples,[320] and that the functioning of the *devadāsīs* of Jagannātha temple as sacred prostitutes, noticed by W.W. Hunter in the nineteenth century,[321] possibly originated in the same period.

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[317] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

[318] M.P. Dash, 'Some Aspects of the Social Life under the Sūrya-Gajapati Rule (1435-1540)', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXVII, Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, pp. 94-5.

[319] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 347

The revival of Śākta literature that took place in Orissa in the Sūryavaṁśī epoch may have had something to do with the ascent, contemporaneous to it, of the worship of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā with its underlying mystic-erotic implications. It was especially goddess Durgā — whose cult, as earlier indicated, was then allied with the one of Jagannātha in the context of the kingship ideology — who was glorified by the Sūryavaṁśī emperors and by the poets patronised by them. The celebrated Oriyā poet Sāralā Dāsa, a contemporary of Kapilendradeva, sung the praise of Durgā especially in her manifestation as Sāralā Caṇḍī, whose shrine at Jhankad (Cuttack district) rose to eminence in that very period. He composed the *Caṇḍī Purāṇa*, a work based on the Durgā-Mahiṣa myth which gives an account of many local goddess-cults of Orissa. His other famous works, the Oriyā *Mahābhārata* and the *Bilaṅkā Rāmāyaṇa*, also have a Śākta background. Other Oriyā authors composed works on Śakti-worship stressing particularly its ritual aspects. Balarāma Dāsa (sixteenth century AD) wrote the *Lakṣmī* or *Mahālakṣmī Purāṇa*, which is still today a very popular work among the Oriyā folk masses. In his work entitled *Baṭa Avakāśa*, this author associates Lord Jagannātha with a number of Śākta deities. Another famous author of the Sūryavaṁśī epoch, Jagannātha Dāsa, composed a work on the Śaiva-Śākta doctrines. Puruṣottamadeva himself, the emperor of Kaliṅga who reigned from AD 1467 to 1497, is credited with the composition of two Śākta works written in praise of Durgā and of Bhuvaneśvarī respectively.[322]

At this stage of Orissan history, however, Śakti cult had already exhausted its own developmental potentialities as an independent branch of Hinduism, at least in the coastal plains and the river valleys, where the all-pervasive Jagannātha culture, powerfully reinforced by the preachings of some great Vaiṣṇava saints (among whom was Śrī Caitanya), was dominating the religious scenery. The same was, however, not true as regards the hill tracts of inland Orissa, where a number of feudal dynasties subordinated to the central authority often pursued an independent religious policy by virtue of which the Devī, in her various manifestations, continued to occupy a pre-eminent position in the cult practices, as it will be shown in the next section.

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[320] P. Mohanty-Hejmadi, 'Odissi Dance in a Historical Perspective', in H. C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 300.

[321] W.W. Hunter, 'Jagannath', in N.K. Sahu, ed., *A History of Orissa*, pp. 34-5 and 38.

[322] *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts of Orissa,* vol. V: Tantra Manuscripts, compiled by M.P. Dash, pp. XLVIII-XLIX; N. N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

Proliferation of royal goddesses in the later medieval period

As it is well known, the protective function that was anciently assigned to a Hindu *rājā*'s *iṣṭa-devatā* (tutelary or family goddesses) reproduced in the State level the same function assigned in the village level to the *grāma-devatā* (village goddess). The medieval Hindu ruler identified himself with his hereditary kingdom or estate and with its prosperity, and figured himself as the chief of, so to say, an 'extended village' coinciding with the portion of land he ruled over, the tutelary deity of which was generally a female one on the analogy of the all-India village tradition. As the traditional Indian village chief used to act as the main sacrificer on the occasion of the village-goddess festival, so the Hindu monarch or feudal overlord used to preside over the annual celebration of *Durgā-Pūjā*. As a rule, a Hindu *iṣṭa-devatā* was enshrined in the king's or the feudatory's palace in the centre of the capital, and no one could pay homage to her except the members of the *rāj* family. Owing to the process of splitting of royal authority that, in course of time, led to the formation of feudal principalities in the whole of India, the number of royal goddesses was constantly increased so that each newly-created independent State could be provided with a tutelary goddess of its own. Many a Hindu goddess of the regional eminence owe their present fame to their having been in former times the *iṣṭa-devatā*s of this or that royal or feudal dynasty of India.[323]

The Gaṅga and Sūryavaṁśī empires were feudal States, and their sovereigns were the overlords of a coalition of feudatories ruling over different portions of Orissa, the coastal belt of Andhra Pradesh, and south-western Bengal. Although Jagannātha was conceived as the *rāṣṭra-devatā* (national deity) of the Orissan empire, the feudal rulers of the hinterlands of Orissa preferably used to elect as their tutelary deity a form of the great Goddess, this being a very natural choice in a land where Śakti cult was the predominant form of religion from the hoary past. It may be inferred that the custom of assigning the role of tutelary deity of a kṣatriya family to a goddess was as ancient in Orissa as the Mahādevī's association with the ideology of regality, which originated in very remote times in connection with the process of Sanskritisation of tribal goddess-cults carried on by the Āryan or Āryanised aristocracies. The above-discussed role of Durgā as the protectress of military activities further enlightens the functioning of this or that manifestation of hers as the *iṣṭa-devatā* of this or that ruling family of Orissa in the course of the medieval period, in full accordance with the all-India trend.

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[323] M. Biardeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-9 and 173.

It is evident that in the later medieval period some local goddesses of Orissa rose to eminence due, in the first place, to their acting as the tutelary deities of some feudatory families. The process of formation of small principalities enjoying a semi-independent political status under the control of the Bhoi *mahārājās* of Khurda or, more directly, of the various Muslim sovereigns to whom the latter were in their turn subject, which started in the second half of the sixteenth century AD, brought about the transformation of these goddesses into royal goddesses by full title as the former feudatories of the Gaṅgas and of the Sūryavaṁśīs officially obtained the dignity of *rājās*. The historical development of the most important among such goddess-cults of Orissa is summarised in the present section.

BHAÑJAS OF MAYURBHANJ

The Bhañja rulers of Khijjiṅga-koṭṭa (modern Khiching) had as their tutelary deity the goddess Kīcakeśvarī (the Lady-of-Ogres), a form of Cāmuṇḍā. The name Kīcakeśvarī appears to be a corruption of Khijjiṅgeśvarī (the Lady-of-Khiching). The original shrine of this goddess, whose ancient cult image is presently placed within the sanctum of the reconstructed Kīcakeśvarī temple at Khiching, (*fig.* 53) was most likely destroyed along with all the other monuments of that town in AD 1361 on the occasion of sultan of Delhi Fīrūz Tughlaq's invasion of Orissa. When the Bhañjas, most likely in consequence of that Muslim raid, transferred their capital from Khiching to Bahalada, they installed in the latter town a new image of goddess Kīcakeśvarī as their family deity. They also followed this religious procedure when they shifted their capital from Bahalada to Hariharpur in between the fourteenth and the fifteenth century AD. When they made their last capital at Baripada, the image of Kīcakeśvarī was removed from the Hariharpur royal palace to the Baripada one, in the premises of which the goddess is still today worshipped as the tutelary deity by the dethroned descendants of the Bhañja dynasty.[324]

Thus, Cāmuṇḍā/Kīcakeśvarī has acted for at least one thousand years as the *iṣṭa-devatā* of the Bhañjas of Mayurbhanj, with this suggesting the deep-rootedness of Śakti cult in that semi-tribal mountainous region of Orissa.

BHAÑJAS OF KEONJHAR

The Bhañjas of Khijjiṅga-koṭṭa split up in course of time into two branches, one of which continued to rule over the present Mayurbhanj district while the other settled into the present Keonjhar district, bordering on the former to the west. An old tradition runs that Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar were once one kingdom, which was later on divided into two by two brothers.[325] The Bhañjas of Keonjhar, along with those of Mayurbhanj, always represented a serious threat to the Moghul domination over the coastal provinces of Orissa, particularly in the second half of the seventeenth century AD.[326]

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[324] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 141 and 179.

The *iṣṭa-devatā* of the Bhañja royal family of Keonjhar was goddess Tāriṇī of Ghatgaon, a village lying amidst dense forest at the distance of about fifty km from Keonjhargarh to the south-east. This folk goddess, worshipped in the past through human sacrifices in accordance with the ancestral customs of the tribes settled in the area, is represented by a piece of stone attached with a protruding tongue, two eyes and a crown so as to suggest the idea of a feminine head. She is extremely popular among the Oriyā Hindus, who throng in large crowds to her open-air shrine and use to offer up there coconuts, bananas, flower garlands, incense sticks, votive candles, bangles, clothes, earthenware and horses, etc.

As regards its origin, the *pīṭha* of Tāriṇī was associated — probably in modern times and under the royal patronage — with the Orissan historical legend about the victory of Kanchipuram (*Kāñcī Vijaya*), which was gained, as stated in the regional tradition, by the Sūryavaṁśī emperor Puruṣottamadeva (AD 1467-97) over the emperor of Vijayanagara, figuring in this legend as the king of Kanchipuram in the Tamil country.[327] The story runs that Govinda Bhañja of Keonjhar, the commander-in-chief of the Orissan army during the legendary siege of Kanchipuram, realised on that occasion that the presiding goddess of the city, Tāriṇī, should be propitiated in order to secure Puruṣottamadeva's victory in the war expedition. Govinda Bhañja's strategy was so successful that, after the war was won, he asked the emperor the permission to accompany goddess Tāriṇī and her semi-tribal priests to his ancestral kingdom, as the goddess in person had told him in dream. Tāriṇī followed Govinda Bhañja day and night on his return home, jingling her *nūpura* (ankle-bells) in order to let the king perceive her presence behind him. When the royal party entered the thick jungle of Keonjhar district, the king could no longer hear the sound made by the goddess and looked back out of curiosity. To his surprise, he found Tāriṇī standing in an unhappy mood and, consequently, bowed his head down before her; but when he raised it again, he found that the goddess had turned herself into a stone. She told him to worship her at that very spot as the Goddess of the Forest (Vana-Durgā) and to worship another representative image of hers at the royal palace as the tutelary deity of his family.[328]

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[325] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

[326] S.M. Mohapatra, 'The Princely States of Orissa in Retrospect', in M.N. Das, ed., *Sidelights on History and Culture of Orissa*, p. 222.

[327] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-9.

[328] H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, pp. 112-9.

The city of Kanchipuram is perhaps identified in this tradition as the original seat of worship of goddess Tāriṇī on account of its having been all through the ages the stronghold of Devī-worship in south India. The magnificent temple of Kāmākṣī, a very ancient Śākta *pīṭha* dedicated to goddess Amman (Pārvatī), was built there in the form of a *yantra*, with this feature suggesting its Śākta-Tāntric nature.[329]

RĀJĀS OF TALCHER

The tutelary deity of the royal family of Talcher, a centre situated in Dhenkanal district, was the igneous goddess Hiṅgulā of Gopalprasad, who manifests herself every year towards the end of the month of Caitra (March-April) in the form of natural gas jets that are either ignited by the goddess' priests or ignite themselves on contact with the air. Such hot gas jets burst forth from the coal seams scattered below the surface of the fields adjoining the village of Gopalprasad.

The great fire-festival celebrated at Gopalprasad on the eve of the full moon in the month of Caitra (*Hiṅgulā Yātrā*) is discussed in detail in another chapter of the present work; it must, however, be pointed out here that, on that occasion, the *rājā* of Talcher and his wife must come to Gopalprasad and offer up some ceremonial dresses of theirs, which are placed upon a canopy erected over the sacred fire representing Hiṅgulā. The royal dresses are then covered with the dresses offered by the common devotees of the goddess, which prevent the former to be damaged by the fire below. At the end of this rite, the royal dresses are given back intact, and blessed with Hiṅgulā's sacred fire, to their owners. This peculiar rite, perhaps symbolising the self-sacrifice performed by the subjects in order to protect their rulers and, at the same time, the 'magical' renewal of the goddess' protection onto the *rāj* family, shows that the semi-tribal cult of Hiṅgulā is still today considered to be a royal one (even though the *rājās* of Talcher have now lost their kingdom).

A legend records that goddess Hiṅgulā was originally the tutelary deity of the previously powerful Nala rulers of the area, who were perhaps a branch of the Nalas of the Koraput-Bastar region (although the latter, active in the later Gupta and post-Gupta periods, do not appear to have ever extended their own dominions up to the Dhenkanal-Talcher region).[330] The goddess is stated to have advised the founder of the royal dynasty of Talcher, Padmanābha Haricandana, to offer her as a sacrifice the head of a fisherman who worshipped Tāleśvarī (the original presiding deity of Talcher as well as of its royal family) in order to win the Nalas and replace them in the rule over the area. The king followed the goddess' suggestion, performed the requested human sacrifice and ultimately defeated the Nalas. Since then onwards the worship of Hiṅgulā has been indissolubly attached to the royal cult at Talcher.[331]

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[329] K.W. Morgan, *The Religion of the Hindus*, New York, 1953, p. 189.

[330] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, p. 91; K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-8.

RĀJĀS OF RANPUR

The *iṣṭa-devatā* of the *rāj* family of Ranpur in Puri district was Maṇināga Devī, a serpent goddess that — if what stated by K.C. Panigrahi, who had the privilege to examine her cult icon undressed, corresponds to the truth[332] — is yet presently represented by the image of a male Maṇināga (Bejewelled-Cobra). This would tally with the opinion of some scholars, according to whom the royal shrine of Ranpur was anciently consecrated to Maṇināgeśvara, a form of Śiva as the overlord of all *nāgas*. This aboriginal deity, who was supposedly very popular among the tribals of central Orissa, might have been assimilated, possibly in the Bhauma-kara period, to the Vaiṣṇavite ophidic deity Ananta/Baladeva, the brother of Kṛṣṇa identified with Viṣṇu's Cosmic Serpent, who later on, under the name of Balabhadra (Jagannātha's elder brother), made his way up into the sanctum of Jagannātha temple at Puri. Two copper-plate inscriptions dating from the sixth-seventh centuries AD testify to the diffusion of Maṇināgeśvara cult in early medieval Orissa. The mount Maināka near Ranpur, on the summit of which the earliest shrine of Maṇināga Devī is to be found, is shaped in the form of a coiled serpent: this circumstance, in all probability, caused this peak to be regarded by the indigenous peoples of the area as the abode of a powerful *nāga* deity. In Indian epic literature we find several references to mountains termed as Maināka, all of which seem to have been originally consecrated to ophidic cults.[333]

Despite its possible connection with ancient Śaivism, it appears more probable that the sanctuary of Ranpur was consecrated since the beginning to a female serpent deity of the tribal origin who, in course of time, came to be known as Maṇināga Devī, as it may be inferred on the basis of the available local traditions. The legend runs that some Śavara priests installed a block of stone on the top of mount Maināka as the cult icon of Maṇināga Devī, who used to accept their offerings by assuming the form of a bejewelled cobra at the time of worship. In the origin, there was no trace of a stone temple dedicated to the goddess there. Later on, the *rājās* of Ranpur, whose palace faced mount Maināka, accepted the goddess as their family deity and annexed the adjacent territories by her grace. Once a neighbouring king came at night to lift the goddess from her shrine, but she went down to the underworld (*pātāla*), leaving a hole behind her. She told the *rāja* of Ranpur in dream that her empty seat should be covered with a golden pot, on which offerings should be made from that time onwards. This the king did, and he also built a temple for the goddess engaging some semi-tribal priests to worship her daily. As the summit of mount Maināka was too difficult for the priests to reach, the goddess once again appeared to the king in dream and intimated him to install a proxy-deity of hers at the foot of the hill. Thus, a new temple was built in the suburbs of Ranpur, at which the daily rituals in honour of Maṇināga Devī are still being officiated to by a special class of semi-tribal priests along with some brāhmaṇa priests. Only on ceremonial occasions offerings are to be made to the goddess at her original seat on the hilltop.[334]

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[331] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

[332] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 455.

[333] S.S. Rajaguru, 'The Olasingh Plate of Banuvardhana', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. II, No. 1, pp. 40 and 45; K.C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-5.

It appears, on the whole, that the shrine on mount Maināka cannot have been originally consecrated to the serpent god Maṇināgeśvara, as some scholars maintain, but rather to the serpent goddess Maṇināga Devī, who still today acts as the tutelary deity of the royal family of Ranpur. The tradition current in the area, according to which human sacrifices were performed in honour of this goddess till 1947,[335] may be taken as an evidence of the shrine on mount Maināka having been, from the remote past, the seat of some tribal goddess-cult. The sacrificial victims offered to Maṇināga Devī were reportedly selected among the local children and youth, this being a typical feature of the *Meriah* sacrificial tradition of the Kondhs (who used to perform human sacrifices in honour of their earth-goddess only).

BHAÑJAS OF GHUMSAR

The *iṣṭa-devatā* of the Bhañja dynasty of Ghumsar (Ganjam district) was Vyāghra Devī of Kuladha. This divinity, conceived as a she-tiger, was most likely borrowed by the *rājā*s from the pantheon of nature deities and spirits worshipped by the Kondh communities settled in that part of Orissa.

The Ghumsar branch of the very ancient Bhañja family ruled uninterruptedly from the thirteenth century AD to 1835-37, when the British troops seized the Ghumsar territory through a devastating series of military campaigns. This dynasty of South Orissa also patronised the Śākta-Tāntric cult of Stambheśvarī, having one of its main and oldest centres at Aska in Ganjam district, a city included in the ancestral feudal dominions of the Bhañjas.[336]

The Bhañjas of Ghumsar are considered responsible for the Sanskritisation of the totemistic and aniconic cult of Vyāghra Devī, whose shrine is located in a rock shelter on the Siddheswari mountain facing Kuladha, the old capital of the dynasty. This *devī* is represented by a projection of the rock shelter decked with artificial nose and eyes showing a sort of human mask (*Pl.* XXX). Another representative image of the tiger goddess is worshipped at the foot of the mountain (as it is the case with Maṇināga Devī of Ranpur). A shrine to her dedicated is also to be found in the dilapidated royal palace of the Bhañjas. The goddess is furthermore associated with a number of sister and attendant goddesses enshrined at different sites next to the main sanctuary. The Kondh origin of Vyāghra Devī can be evinced by the fact that a local tradition credits the first Bhañja ruler of Kulhada with the murder of the Kondh chiefs Kulha and Daha (from whose names the name Kulhada is stated to derive) and the subsequent usurpation of the latter's totemistic deity, a tiger goddess who was said to protect the Kondh tribesmen from tigers and other wild beasts that were often believed to be the incarnated forms of malevolent spirits. It appears plausible that the first members of the Bhañja dynasty of Ghumsar adopted Vyāghra Devī as their tutelary deity in order to win the support of their tribal subjects. The Kondh priests attached to the shrine of Kuladha, presently performing the daily worship of the tiger goddess with Brāhmaṇical rites, constitute the living evidence of the tribal origin of the shrine in question.[337] Since in the Indian cultural tradition tiger and lion are interchangeable shapes indicating the feline, the foremost among all animals,[338] it is possible that the Bhañjas accepted Vyāghra Devī as a manifestation of Durgā, who was traditionally associated with the lion as well as with the tiger.

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[334] H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, pp. 96-8.

[335] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[336] A.K. Rath, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

The religion of the Kondh tribe, as it is well-known, was once pivoted upon the practice of the *Meriah*, i.e., human sacrifice in honour of the earth goddess; the area of Bhanjanagar, in which the shrine of Kuladha is situated, was, on the other hand, the seat of the Meriah Agency established by the British in the period from 1836 to 1854 to extirpate that Kondh sacrificial rite from the territory of the Ganjam Māls (the hill tracts to the west of Chilika Lake).[339] Also the Hinduised shrine of Vyāghra Devī, as is known from the British records of that period, was the seat of human sacrifices. This is further substantiated by a local legend according to which one day Vyāghra Devī's priest, who had come back home from the top of the Siddheswari mountain forgetting to bring the sacred pitcher with him, went up there again to recover it and found the tiger goddess and her associates Caṇḍī and Cāmuṇḍā eating the sacrificial animals. This legend lays emphasis on the wild and blood-thirsty nature of the tiger goddess, with this suggesting that, in times past, she may have been propitiated through the sacrifice of human beings.[340]

RĀJĀS OF BAUDH

The tutelary goddess of the *rājās* of Baudh was Bhairavī, who is still venerated in a shrine lying near the old palace of that town. The Śākta-Tāntric cult of Bhairavī gradually spread over the Baudh-Khondmals region during the medieval period in consequence of the Sanskritisation of some indigenous goddess-cults, particularly those of the Kondh origin. This manifestation of the Mahādevī is likely to have been conceived as a sort of supreme *yoginī* (ogress), as may be deduced from the fact, that the presiding deity of the other eminent shrine to her consecrated in the area formerly ruled over by the *rājā*s of Baudh, located at Purunakatak, is still today credited with spirit-possession phenomena affecting a number of girls. As it is reported, these girls generally die of a mysterious death as if they were possessed by an ogress or *yoginī*, identified by the people with Bhairavī of Purunakatak herself.

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[337] A.K. Rath, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-8; H.C. Das, 'Religious Movements in Southern Orissa', p. 34; H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, pp. 152-7.

[338] S. Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, Calcutta, 1946, II, p. 333.

[339] N.R. Hota, 'Human Sacrifice among the Khonds of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. VIII, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 163.

[340] H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, pp. 152-3 and 155.

The *rājā*s of Baudh, who rose to eminence in central Orissa during the Moghul period, became allied with the British during the Marāṭhā War of 1800-03, which, among other things, caused the annexation of the coastal belt of Orissa to the British direct dominions in Bengal.[341] Some British officers, who visited the Court of Baudh in the first half of the nineteenth century, were told that human sacrifices had been offered to Bhairavī till recent times in the territories subject to the jurisdiction of the local *rājā*s, as well as in the very premises of the royal Bhairavī temple at Baudh, on the occasion of the annual celebrations of *Durgā-Pūjā*.[342] These accounts substantiate the Kondh origin of this regional Śākta-Tāntric cult.

CAUHĀNS OF PATNA

The ancient city of Patnagarh, situated in the present Balangir district, was the capital of a Hindu kingdom from the later medieval period to 1872. According to a legend corroborated by some archaeological finds, the origin of the royal family of Patnagarh dates from the fall of the Somavaṁśī kingdom in the early twelfth century AD, some decades after which Rāmaideva, a supposed scion of the Cauhān dynasty of Rajasthan (a Rājpūt one), established his rule over the Patnagarh region.[343] Some scholars, however, are of the opinion that the Cauhān kingdom of Patnagarh cannot have been founded prior to the middle of the fourteenth century AD.[344] Whatever may be the case here, the establishment of the shrine of Paṭaneśvarī (the Lady-of-Patna), the tutelary goddess of the Cauhāns of Patnagarh, is traditionally ascribed to king Rāmaideva, the founder of the dynasty.

The temple of Paṭaneśvarī lying inside the old Cauhān fort of Patnagarh is assigned to the sixteenth century AD,[345] although the cult image enshrined therein, a ten-armed

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[341] S.M. Mohapatra, *art. cit.*, p. 225.

[342] P. Mukherjee, 'Human Sacrifices among the Khonds of Orissa — A Note', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. VIII, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 167.

[343] S.M. Mohapatra, *art. cit.*, p. 219.

[344] N. Senapati and N.K. Sahu, eds., *Balangir District Gazetteer*, p. 488.

[345] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Mahiṣamardinī, apparently dates from the Somavaṁśī age.[346] It seems that Paṭaneśvarī was originally a local goddess worshipped in aniconic form by the tribals living in the area, and that the Cauhān rulers, on account of her popularity among their subjects, made her the presiding deity of their fortified capital and its hinterland as well as their *iṣṭa-devatā*, representing her as Mahiṣamardinī.[347]

The goddess is worshipped as Durgā through a daily Śākta-Tāntric ritual based on *mantras* and *yantras*. The priests who officiate to her cult still today belong to a kṣatriya sub-caste, with this testifying to the past function of Paṭaneśvarī temple as a royal and military shrine. The wide diffusion of Tāntric magic practices at Patnagarh during the medieval period is demonstrated by the earlier discussed legends relating to the magic exploits of the so-called Seven Tāntric Maidens in that town.

CAUHĀNS OF SAMBALPUR AND SONEPUR

In the middle part of the sixteenth century AD a member of the Cauhān ruling family of Patnagarh, Balarāmadeva, founded an independent kingdom at Sambalpur on the upper course of the Mahanadi. The legend runs that the king, who is also credited with the foundation of the city of Sambalpur, installed the ancestral tutelary deity of his family, goddess Samaleśvarī (also known as Samalei), as the presiding deity of his newly-built capital, the name of which, in fact, means 'the city of Samalei'. The name Samalei is believed to have derived from the term *simul* (also spelt as *semal* or *simli*), which indicates the cotton-producing tree (*Bombax malabaricum*): the legend, indeed, relates that one such tree once stood on the rocky island in the bed of the Mahanadi where the image of goddess Samalei was installed by the king for worship[348] (*fig.* 57).

On the basis of a popular tradition recording that the image of Samalei was brought to Sambalpur from the north by the first member of the local *rāj* family, K.C. Panigrahi infers that the rulers of Sambalpur possibly came, along with their tutelary goddess, from the Moradabad area of Rohilkhand, in which the ruins of the ancient city of Sambhalapura are to be found.[349] Such a statement is well-suited to the *rājās* of Sambalpur's claim to be the descendants of the Cauhāns of Rajasthan: a branch of that illustrious Rājpūt family, indeed, might have been ruling for some time over the Moradabad area, situated to the east of Delhi, before the Muslims drove it into Orissa.

Yet goddess Samalei is considered by some scholars to be an aboriginal deity, not an imported one.[350] Her cult image, indeed, is represented by a large stone block in the middle of which a narrow groove is regarded as the mouth of the goddess, while a protuberance situated below the latter is regarded as Kālī's protruding tongue. The deity's eyes are represented by two depressions covered with golden leaf. When it is dressed in the standard garments and ornaments, the worshipped image of Samalei resembles the face of a Hindu goddess, but nevertheless, its aniconic nature reminds of the rough stone simulacra venerated by the tribals since prehistoric times (*fig.* 66).

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[346] J.P. Singhdeo, *art. cit.*, pp. 33-5.

[347] H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, pp. 119-21.

[348] N. Senapati and B. Mahanti, eds., *Sambalpur District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1971, p. 2.

[349] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-10.

Moreover, the red-blossomed *simul* tree, from which the very name Samalei is thought to have derived, is associated in some tribal cultures of Orissa (for instance, among the Gadabas of Koraput district) with memorial feasts of the megalithic type, during the celebration of which buffaloes are sacrificed, menhirs erected, and trees (generally, *simuls*) planted.[351] Among the Hill Saoras, the *simul* tree is considered to be one of the favourite haunts of Buttamboi, the female spirit who visits young men in dreams and saps their manhood, robbing them of their virility (an equivalent of the well-known *cuṛail*, who is the ghost of a girl who dies young and beautiful at the time of her menarche). This tribe furthermore, uses the wood of the *simul* tree to make the little chariot of the divinity of cholera during the outbreaks of that disease.[352] Among the Mundas and Oraons, numerous communities of whom are settled in Sambalpur district, the silk-cotton tree called *simul* forms the central element of the preparatory ceremonies for the ritual spring hunt. A sapling of *simul* is ceremonially burned by both those tribes to symbolically represent forest-firing and the hunt connected with it. Among the Mundas, this rite is associated with the sacrifice of a red fowl, which is burnt alive, to Birchandi, a female deity presiding over wild animals.[353]

There seems, therefore, to exist more than one connection between the *simul* tree — which for the Hindus is sacred to the god of death Yama[354] — and the complex of religious beliefs and practices (ancestor-worship, buffalo-sacrifice, ritual spring hunt, the supernatural origin attributed to both sex and diseases) associated, in some tribal cultures of Orissa, with the mysterious power of female deities. The concept about goddess Samalei, the deity of the *simul* tree, appears, on the whole, to be rooted in Orissa's tribal cultures. Thus, whatever may have been the origin of the *rāj* family of Sambalpur, it appears probable that its first members limited themselves to change the pre-existing tribal cult of Samalei into a royal one, gaining, just by virtue of that, the favour of the tribal communities living in the area.

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[350] N. Senapati and B. Mahanti, eds., *Sambalpur District Gazetteer*, p. 61.

[351] V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, p. 124, n. 1.

[352] V.Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, pp. 99 and 206.

[353] R. Rahmann, 'The Ritual Spring Hunt of Northeastern and Middle India', *Anthropos*, vol. XLVII (1952), pp. 874-5.

[354] V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, p. 124, n. 1.

In course of time, a branch of the Cauhān royal family came to reign over the Sonepur region too as an independent dynasty. Also this newly-created dynasty had goddess Samalei as its tutelary deity, as it is witnessed by the existence in Sonepur town of a fine Śākta-Tāntric temple dedicated to this deity, which was erected in the modern period. Later on, also the Cauhāns of Patnagarh built a temple for Samalei in their capital. As in the case of the main temple at Sambalpur, the presiding deities of these two later temples dedicated to Samalei are worshipped in aniconic form. There is a popular belief that the head of Samalei is being worshipped at Sambalpur, the feet at Sonepur, and the navel portion at Patnagarh.

It can be, thus, concluded that goddess Samalei is indissolubly connected with the history of the different branches of the Cauhān ruling family of North-West Orissa and their capitals.

NĀGAVAṀŚĪS OF KALAHANDI

The Nāga dynasty of Kalahandi established a kingdom in the upper Tel Valley in the period of decline of the Somavaṁśīs, who from their sub-capital Sonepur had dominated for centuries that part of West Orissa. The Tel basin is an old area of settlement of Dravidian-speaking communities (Gond and Kondh).[355] The *rājās* of Kalahandi, like many other Śaiva ruling families of medieval India such as, just to give an instance, the Nāgavaṁśīs of the Chota Nagpur Plateau, claimed their descent from the mythical Nāga race, a half-deified human lineage, the members of which were considered the blood relations of the Nāgas meant as serpent geniuses. Some scholars have hypothesised that the mythical Nāga people hinted at in the Purāṇas might symbolise the Dravidian religio-cultural matrix of the Gonds, being ophiolatry a widespread form of cult among the latter.[356]

In the early capital city of the Nāga kings of Kalahandi, Junagarh, we still find a temple dedicated to goddess Laṅkeśvarī, the ancient tutelary deity of the dynasty, who was replaced in around the late twelfth century AD by another goddess termed as Maṇikeśvarī. In the early phase of the history of the kingdom of Kalahandi (eleventh-twelfth century AD) human sacrifices were occasionally offered to goddess Laṅkeśvarī in the capital, the ancient name of which, Junabali (Old-Sacrifice), appears associated with the bloody religious practice in question.[357] Laṅkeśvarī was, among other things, also the presiding deity of the Sonepur region at the time when the latter was being ruled over by the last Somavaṁśī monarchs and, later on, by the Telugu Coḍas (eleventh and early twelfth centuries AD). She was, and still is worshipped at Sonepur in the form of a flat rocky islet cropping up from the bed of the Mahanadi and extending for several metres to the four directions. A dilapidated temple as well as a modern two-storeyed structure are to be found on the islet. From Sonepur, going up the course of the river Tel, the cult dedicated to this goddess might have reached Junagarh, situated far South.

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[355] S.M. Mohapatra, *art. cit.*, p. 219.

[356] A. Sen, *Animal Motifs in Ancient Indian Art*, Calcutta, 1972, p. 47; S. N. Rajaguru, 'The Nāga Dynasty of Chakrakota', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vols. XXIV, XXV and XXVI, pp. 25-7.

[357] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Kalahandi District Gazetteer*, pp. 53 and 449.

Laṅkeśvarī is stated by tradition to have been the protectress of Laṅkā at the time when that mythical city was being ruled over by Rāvaṇa.[358] In the *Rāmāyaṇa* the presiding goddess of Laṅkā, incarnating the magic forces pervading the capital of the *rākṣasas*, is referred to as Laṅkā Devī or also as Laṅkinī.[359] This deity — who, it is understood, is but a manifestation of the universal Śakti — is conceived as the dark aspect of the ambivalent great Goddess propitiated by Rāma before his final combat with Rāvaṇa. This epiphany of the Mahādevī, associated with both Rāma/Viṣṇu and the *rākṣasas*, i.e., with both the divine and the demonic, has been actively worshipped for centuries under the name of Rāmacaṇḍī at some celebrated Śākta shrines located in the Puri-Konarak area as well as in the district of Dhenkanal (Kosala).

As already indicated, starting from the late twelfth century AD the *iṣṭa-devatā* of the Nāga kings of Kalahandi became goddess Maṇikeśvarī, an autochthonous deity who was originally worshipped in aniconic form. The present cult image of this royal goddess represents a *nāgamātā*, which fact appears more in line with the self-styled Nāga origin of the royal family of Kalahandi. The representative icon of Maṇikeśvarī, assigned to about the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries AD, is now enshrined within the sanctum of a temple erected by the Nāgavaṁśīs monarchs in the premises of their palace at Bhawanipatna, the city they elected as their capital from around the year 1850. The annual *Durgā-Pūjā* festival was celebrated there with great pomp and grandeur and with hecatombs of sacrificial animals till the end of the princely rule in 1947.[360]

RĀJĀS OF JAYPUR

The *rājās* of the Solar Dynasty, who ruled over the State of Jaypur (old Koraput district) from the middle of the fifteenth century AD till the end of the British domination, had as their tutelary deity goddess Kanaka Durgā, whose cult image was installed at Nandapur (the dynasty's early capital lying at a distance of about thirty km south of Koraput) by king Vijaya Candra in the late fifteenth century AD. The image was subsequently shifted to Jaypur, the later State capital.[361]

The Sanskrit term *kanaka* indicates gold or, more properly, an alloy made up of eight different metals. Kanaka Durgā means, therefore, Durgā-Made-of-Gold. An important temple dedicated to this Śākta divinity is also to be found at Vijayawada in present Andhra Pradesh, adjoining the southern uplands of the Jaypur ex-State.[362] In the fifteenth century AD the city of Vijayawada was included in the Sūryavaṁśī empire, for which reason the existence of an ancient link between these two Kanaka Durgās appears to be more than a probability.

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[358] N. Senapati and N.K. Sahu, eds., *Balangir District Gazetteer*, pp. 47 and 494; R. P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

[359] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 57; M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

[360] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Kalahandi District Gazetteer*, p. 117.

[361] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Koraput District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1966, p. 59.

The annual *Durgā-Pūjā* festival, once celebrated with great pomp at Jaypur for sixteen days, had its main centre at the royal shrine of Kanaka Durgā located in the premises of the *mahārājā*'s palace. In by-gone days, during the festival, all of the high officers and feudatories of the ex-State used to form an elephant procession and go to a mango groove situated north of the built-up area, at which place some special rites in honour of goddess Kanaka Durgā were performed. Also the rite of human sacrifice, as reported by some British authorities, was once regularly performed at Jaypur on the occasion of the *Durgā-Pūjā*; this was subsequently replaced by the immolation of buffaloes, goats and sheep. It is worth noticing that the animals offered to Kanaka Durgā are still today called *meriah-puṣpas*, this name being very likely to represent a reminiscence of human sacrifices performed after the Kondh fashion. In by-gone days, human victims were reportedly immolated to Kanaka Durgā during epidemics too.[363]

BHOIS OF KHURDA

Our survey of the tutelary goddesses of the main princely dynasties of Orissa from the later medieval period onwards ends with the *mahārājās* of Khurda, who, after the Muslims of Bengal had conquered Orissa (AD 1568), were recognised as the most important among the Hindu feudatory families of the region inasmuch as they maintained the title of Gajapati (Lord-of-Elephants) along with all the other sovereign titles formerly used by the Sūryavaṁśīs, the last imperial dynasty of Kaliṅga. The king of Khurda maintained the Sūryavaṁśī Gajapati's legacy also in his role as the supreme custodian of the temple of Jagannātha at Puri.

The Bhois of Khurda were the descendants of the Bhois of Kaliṅga, who ruled over the Orissan empire from AD 1542 to 1560 after having usurped the throne of the Sūryavaṁśīs. The last member of the Bhoi dynasty was in his turn dethroned by Mukundadeva Cālukya, the last independent Hindu monarch of Kaliṅga. The Bhoi emperors came from a non-kṣatriya caste, the Karan one (an Orissan caste of writers), whereas their ancestors might have even belonged to the caste of cowherds.[364] Their descendants the *maharājās* of Khurda exerted a direct political jurisdiction only over the area covered by the present Puri district, although more than thirty among *rājās* (feudal chiefs) and *zamīndārs* (landlords), including among them the ones of Angul, Talcher, Dhenkanal, Banki, Baramba, Nayagarh, Ranpur and

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[362] G.S. Ghurye, *Gods and Men*, Bombay, 1962, p. 245.

[363] N. Senapati and N.K. Sahu, eds., *Koraput District Gazetteer*, pp. 139-40 and 415; P. Mukherjee, *art. cit.*, pp. 166-7.

[364] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-40.

Banpur, owed their allegiance to them. The Bhois continued to hold a semi-independent status under the Moghul, Marāṭhā and British dominations as the paramount Hindu power of Orissa. The immense prestige enjoyed by the rulers of Khurda in the whole of Orissa after the loss of independence in AD 1568 was above all due to their role as the custodians of the great temple of Jagannātha at Puri, the symbol of unity of the Oriyā nation. To seal this role of theirs, the Bhois also bore the title of *rājās* of Puri, which still today belongs by right to their descendants.[365]

The *iṣṭa-devatā* of the kings of Khurda was represented by a pair of goddesses, Baruṇei and Aruṇei, being still today enshrined in a modern temple situated at the foot of Baruṇei Hill near Khurda (a hillock covered with thick jungle that was used in ancient times as the abode of Buddhist ascetics).[366] These twin goddesses acted as the protectresses of the fort of Khurda, the old residence of the royal family, the remains of which are still visible at the site amidst dense jungle. The fort was taken by storm and destroyed by British troops after a long siege at the time of the Khurda rebellion of 1804.

The twin goddesses Baruṇei and Aruṇei are already mentioned in Balarāma Dāsa's Oriyā work *Baṭa Avakāśa*, dating from the sixteenth century AD, that is, from the very period in which the Bhoi dynasty rose to eminence.[367] Their small images, both two-armed and carved out of chlorite, are placed side by side on a low platform in the temple sanctum and are flanked by a lion on either side. Baruṇei holds a water pot and a mace while Aruṇei holds *triśūla* (trident) and *ḍamaru* (drum in form of an hour glass). The twin goddesses are identified by the local priests as forms of Pārvatī. Their warrior aspect as the protectresses of the Bhoi monarchs of Khurda and their fortified palace is stressed by the presence of a miniature shrine dedicated to Hanumān in the temple compound.

In conclusion, it can be maintained that the later developments of Śakti cult in the Princely States of Orissa, mostly lying in the hill tracts of the country, were not aligned with the general trend that had prevailed for centuries in the heart of the Gaṅga and Gajapati empires (the modern Puri, Cuttack and Balasore districts). The influence of ancient tribal cultures on Śāktism, indeed, was more strongly felt in the most peripheral or inaccessible areas of Orissa than in its alluvial and coastal plains, where the process of Sanskritisation of the autochthonous female-oriented cults had started in the course of the Gupta age, or even before it. The feudal rulers of the inland regions of Orissa, even after they assumed the status of *rājās* in consequence of the collapse of any central political authority due to the Muslim invasion of AD 1568, had to treat with respect the socio-religious traditions of their tribal and semi-tribal subjects, who formed the bulk of the population of their States. They could not merely absorb Śakti cult into a national religion dominated by Vaiṣṇavism (in the form of Jagannātha cult), like the Gaṅga and Gajapati monarchs had striven to do with a certain success in the period ranging from the twelfth to fifteenth century AD. Therefore, some typical features of the most archaic strata of Śakti cult, such as the practice of human sacrifice, aniconism in the representation of female deities, the entrustment of temple rituals to groups of tribal or semi-tribal priests, etc., persisted in the Orissan Princely States till the beginning of the British rule, modelling in those regions most of the royal goddess-cults. Therefore, the historical development of Śakti cult was not one and the same in all parts of Orissa.

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[365] R.P. Mohapatra, *art. cit.*, pp. 129-31.

[366] H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', p. 95.

[367] K.S. Behera, *art. cit.*, pp. 85-6.

Final considerations

To sum up the contents of the present chapter, the history of Orissa, both political and religious, virtually starts from the Mauryan monarch Aśoka (third century BC), subsequently witnessing and experiencing epoch-making events of warfare, empire-building and consolidation activities, evolution, development and spread of religious faiths — classical, folk and tribal — in a balanced manner for centuries. The royal patrons and the people at large contributed immensely for maintenance of the religious traditions. The sectarian rivalry, which was an all-India phenomenon, did not affect much here, rather maintained a religious equilibrium by interchanging, assimilating and integrating ideas and traits from one faith to the other. This was a characteristic feature in all the cultural phases of Orissa's religious history.

The nascent stage of the religious history of Orissa is marked for the gradual emergence of the worship of *nāga-nāgī* and *yakṣa-yakṣī* (in the post-Aśokan period) out of the complex of malevolent deities and spirits worshipped by the tribals. The demonic cults of the tribals, originally associated with Buddhism, gradually crept, in various forms, into the Brāhmaṇical religion. The dynasty of Khāravela (first century BC), who championed the cause of Jainism making it the State religion of Kaliṅga, seems to have developed an eclectic attitude to the then prevailing religious cults.

The religious development in Orissa from the downfall of this dynasty till the rise of the Guptas is somewhat hazy in view of the paucity of direct evidence. The earliest known Brāhmaṇical Śākta *pīṭha*, having as its presiding deity a two-armed Mahiṣamardinī, was established at Jajpur as a mark of the revivalist movement of Brāhmaṇism led by the illustrious Gupta monarchs. The Śailodbhavas of Koṅgoda, being the ardent devotees of Śiva, erected the earliest known Śaivite monuments in Orissa at Bhubaneswar and Bankada, their State capital, setting and carving Śākta icons in the Śaiva temples and establishing Śākta shrines at Banpur, Bankada and in many other places in their kingdom (of course, as a part of Śaivism).

The Bhaumas, who succeeded the Śailodbhavas, brought about a remarkable social change and a significant transformation in the religious sphere introducing Tāntric elements into Śaivism, Śāktism and Buddhism (the last one being initially their official religion). The construction of Śākta-Tāntric monuments at Bhubaneswar, Jajpur, Hirapur (Sixty-Four Yoginī temple), etc., the spread of Vajrayāna (Tāntric) Buddhism at different places of their kingdom with the concentration at Ratnagiri, Lalitgiri and Udaygiri in Cuttack district, the introduction of an esoteric Tāntric mode of worship in the Śākta centres, the incorporation of some hideous tribal rituals in the faiths then prevalent in Orissa thanks to the medium represented by the Kāpālika ascetics, the introduction of women of the royal family as monarchs, are some of the important characteristic features of the Bhauma age.

The Somavaṁśīs, who succeeded the Bhaumas, were great conquerors and munificent patrons of art and religion. They unified western and coastal Orissa into a vast kingdom, were the great builders of Hindu temples spreading the fame of the Kaliṅga School of Art and Architecture all over India, and erected the magnificent temples at Jajpur, Bhubaneswar and in many other places of Orissa. Like the Guptas, they were to a great extent responsible in reviving the Brāhmaṇical religion and also changed the heterogeneous Tāntric practices in the worship patterns in the temples. Unlike their predecessors the Bhauma-karas, they viewed the gods and goddesses as fundamentally benign manifestations and, accordingly, modelled their representative images emitting elegance and celestial smile. Dancing and singing as a part of temple rituals was introduced by them in the Śaiva shrines of Orissa. The Somavaṁśī kings further broadened the horizon of Śaivism and Śāktism with the installation of more shrines and the popularisation of the existing religious centres.

The illustrious Gaṅgas and Sūryavaṁśīs (who ruled for about five centuries), being tolerant and eclectic in their religious outlook, brought about a syncreticism by incorporating all of the existing religious trends into Vaiṣṇavism. The *bhakti*-based religion tinged with the tenets of Vaiṣṇavite saints, centring round the national deity Śrī Jagannātha of Puri, pervaded the religious atmosphere in the Orissan empire. Śakti in various manifestations became more popular in this epoch as the consort of this or that great god, in fact, without affecting the existing Śākta-Tāntric centres. Cult syncreticism was perceptibly marked in sculptural art and painting.

After the downfall of the Orissan empire in the mid-sixteenth century AD and the establishment of the Muslim domination over the coastal belt of the State, the legacy of the age-old Śākta-Tāntric cults of Orissa was maintained by the feudatory dynasties of the hilly hinterlands.

One can, on the whole, state that all the trends of thought having emerged in Orissa over the ages got integrated in this land of excellence of art and religion under the patronage of the royal families and the support of devoted people. Therefore, the speciality and peculiarity of Orissa lie in the maintenance of the age-old religious rituals despite the impact of modernism.

3

Important Śākta Centres of Orissa

THIS is a chapter dealing with the important Śākta centres of Orissa which have been seats of religious activities from ancient times. I have tried here to avoid a discussion on the traditional Śākta *pīṭhas* which presuppose the propitiation of a manifestation of Śakti (iconic or aniconic) along with her Bhairava or consort. Different Purāṇic accounts enumerate Virajā (Jajpur), Ekāmra (Bhubaneswar) and Puruṣottama (Puri) in the lists of Śākta *pīṭhas* varying from eight to one hundred-eight in total, but, in fact, in some centres of Orissa of Śākta eminence the presiding goddess is not associated with a form of Bhairava. Hence, my concentration is focused here on eight such centres or *pīṭhas* of Orissa which originated in the distant past and still continue in full working order as popular seats of Devī-worship with a large following irrespective of caste, sect and creed.

The eight *pīṭhas* to be discussed in the succeeding pages are considered as the Caṇḍī *pīṭhas* (the Seats-of-the-Wrathful-One), established to protect the State from enemies and also to bestow boons and welfare on the people. These centres are also associated with some other functions. I may point out here that Orissa has the distinction of possessing numerous Śākta centres (big and small), many of which have been discussed directly or indirectly in the appropriate sections. Hence, I do not repeat those here again. The eight *pīṭhas* in question are discussed below in the following order:

Name of the *pīṭha*	Presiding goddess
1. Jajpur	Virajā
2. Puruṣottama or Puri	Vimalā
3. Kakatpur	Maṅgalā
4. Jhankad	Sāralā
5. Banki	Carcikā
6. Gopalprasad, Talcher	Hiṅgulā
7. Banpur	Bhagavatī
8. Bhubaneswar or Ekāmra	Gopāliṇī or Kīrttimatī (more popular as Bhuvaneśvarī)

Sometimes goddess Samalei of Sambalpur is taken as another Caṇḍī.

The origin of each of such Śākta centres is traced back to a very remote period, as early as the Gupta age. As already stated, some of the Śākta *pīṭhas* of Orissa find mention in the traditional lists of Śākta *pīṭhas*.

Jajpur

The origin and early history of the great shrine of goddess Virajā at Jajpur, the oldest and most celebrated Śākta *pīṭha* of Orissa, have been already discussed in chapter 2; the present section, therefore, deals exclusively with the later medieval developments of Virajā cult on the one hand, and with the ritualistic pattern being presently observed at the shrine on the other.

As earlier observed, the present temple of goddess Virajā cannot be the same one inside which her representative icon, a two-armed Mahiṣamardinī Durgā dating back to the Gupta period, was venerated in the times of the Bhauma-karas and the Somavaṁśīs, when the city of Virajā (modern Jajpur) was the metropolis of Utkala (the central coastal region of Kaliṅga). Virajā temple is, in fact, a relatively modern construction, not lying on the same spot where the goddess was enshrined during the early medieval period. The temple is *pañca-ratha* in design — viz., it has each of its outer faces divided in five vertical segments — and has been covered with a thick coat of plaster painted in bright colours. On its external walls, or on its compound wall, are affixed some early medieval sculptures representing Kārttikeya, Ardhanārīśvara, Pārvatī, Aja-Ekapāda, Bhairava, Mahiṣamardinī, Hara-Pārvatī, Lakulīśa, Cāmuṇḍā, Gaṅgādharamūrti, Yamunā, and Sarasvatī, all of them dating back to the eighth-ninth centuries AD. Moreover, about one hundred-fifty Śiva-*liṅgas* are housed under a modern shed located within the temple compound.[1] Such characteristics bespeak the tight links of Virajā cult with Śaivism during the Bhauma-kara period.

According to the *Virajā-Kṣetra-Māhātmya*, a work of the later medieval period, the *pīṭha* of Virajā was surrounded by three Varāhas, four Bhairavas, five Nṛsiṁhas, seven Mātṛkās, twelve Gaṇeśas and one hundred-eight Rudras.[2] This list of deities is possibly suggestive of the past existence at Jajpur of a number of Hindu shrines of the different sectarian affiliation, all of which acknowledged the spiritual supremacy of Virajā, the presiding goddess of the *kṣetra*. In the Gaṅga and Sūryavaṁśī epochs, indeed, goddess Virajā acted as the chief representative of Śakti cult in the ambit of the syncretistic worship-system fostered on the national plane by the emperors of Kaliṅga, the *Pañca-devatā-upāsanā* (adoration of the five divinities of the traditional Hindu pentad, i.e., Śiva-Viṣṇu-Śakti-Sūrya-Gaṇeśa),[3] for which reason it appears plausible that all the sectarian shrines then existing in Jajpur owed their allegiance to the Śākta *pīṭha* of Virajā.

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[1] P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report, Vol. I: From 1971 to 1974-75*, Bhubaneswar, s.d., p. 21; T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, Leiden, 1985, p. 187.

[2] R.P. Mohapatra, *Temple Legends of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1989, p. 63.

The *Mādalā Pāñji* (the chronicle of the temple of Jagannātha at Puri) states that Coḍagaṅga, the founder of the Imperial Gaṅga dynasty of Kaliṅga, patronised and favoured the shrine of Virajā, which thing, on the contrary, he would not have done in regard to any other eminent Śākta shrine he found in the country after he had conquered it in around AD 1110.[4] As a possible evidence of this, the outer wall of the *jagamohana* of the reconstructed Virajā temple contains two inscriptions of the time of Coḍagaṅga.[5] The popularity of the shrine of Virajā as the most eminent Śākta *pīṭha* of Orissa, which, after the ancient mention of it contained in the *Mahābhārata*, had been extolled with numerous other mentions in early medieval Tāntric texts and epigraphic records, thus, continued in the later medieval period. As a result of the syncretistic religious policy initiated by the Gaṅgas and later on continued by their dynastic successors the Sūryavaṁśīs, goddess Virajā also became associated with the cosmopolitan cult of Jagannātha; in fact, the *Baṭa Avakāśa*, a work of the sixteenth-century Oriyā poet Balarāma Dāśa, includes her among the divine female attendants of Lord Jagannātha along with Vimalā, Saptamātṛkās, the Sixty-Four Yoginīs and the Nine Kātyāyanīs.[6]

Even a Vaiṣṇava saint like Śrī Caitanya, as stated in the semi-biographical accounts of his life written by his later followers, visited Virajā temple and prayed to the goddess when he passed through Jajpur in the early sixteenth century AD. As it is well known, Caitanyá spent more than twenty years of his life in the city of Puri, where he died in about AD 1533.[7] Since this great saint was a staunch devotee of Lord Jagannātha, it appears clear that, in his time, the worship of goddess Virajā was closely allied with the Vaiṣṇava-dominated form of Hinduism pivoted upon the all-India-famed cult of Jagannātha.

The invasion of Orissa by the Muslims of Bengal in AD 1568, which brought to an end the independent Hindu rule over the country, involved in all probability the desecration or devastation of the medieval temple of Virajā at Jajpur, as it may be demonstrated by the fact that the temple itself was entirely rebuilt at a certain stage of the modern period. It is reported by a local tradition that the Muslim saint 'Alī Bukhārī, an Afghan iconoclast follower of Kālāpahār (the commander-in-chief of the armies of the sultan of Bengal), was responsible, on that occasion, for the destruction of many Hindu monuments at Jajpur, including the great temple of Saptamātṛkās before whose ruins his monumental tomb was subsequently built up.[8] Considering the ruthless fury and obstinate hatred that were reportedly displayed by the Muslim invaders of Orissa against the most important Śākta shrines of the country, there is no reason to think that the renowned temple of Virajā was spared from the assaults and devastation having been suffered by many other religious centres of Orissa in AD 1568.

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[3] K.C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa (Hindu Period)*, Cuttack, 1981, p. 340.

[4] *Ibid*, p. 334.

[5] P.K. Ray, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[6] K.S. Behera, 'The Evolution of Śakti Cult at Jajpur, Bhubaneswar and Puri', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *The Śakti Cult and Tārā*, Calcutta, 1967, pp. 75-6 and 85.

[7] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

The cosmopolitan nature of the cult tradition regarding goddess Virajā, which took its definite shape in the course of the later medieval period, explains why the ritualistic pattern presently observed at her shrine during some important Hindu festivals of the year appears to be an amalgamation of different traditions concerning the Śākta, Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Gāṇapatya and Saura pantheons as well as, in addition to these, the tribal, Buddhist and Jaina religious traditions. In this connection, the whole sixteen-day worship of the goddess in the month of Āśvina (September-October) is extremely significant in that it manifests numerous reminiscences of an admixture of rites and beliefs of the different origin, each of which, in the past, was prevalent for some time in the coastal provinces of Orissa.[9]

The main rituals of worship being performed in the premises of Virajā temple during the *Durgā-Pūjā* festival can be summarised as follows:

(a) *Navapatrikā ceremony* — The propitiation of goddess Durgā in the form of nine plants bound together in such a way as to resemble the anthropomorphic figure of a female deity is held at the shrine on the days of *Mahāsaptamī*, *Mahāṣṭamī* and *Mahānavamī*. Such a worship pattern, which is also observed in Bengal, seems to be a relic of animistic tree-worship and bears witness to the ancient links between Śakti and Yakṣa cults. A different form of Durgā is imagined to reside in each of the nine plants, invoked by the devotees for gaining protection. The vegetable aspect of Durgā, which is assigned great importance in Hindu folk culture, is, thus, propitiated through this form of worship.[10]

(b) *Ratha Yātrā* — The car festival of goddess Virajā continues for nine days from the *Pratipadā* day to the *Mahānavamī* night. A brass processional image of the goddess is placed on a decorated chariot along with a wooden staff studded with silver and jewels, and the chariot is subsequently made circumambulate the temple for nine times. The staff acting on this occasion as one of the two representative icons of Virajā is perhaps reminiscent of the initial adoration of this goddess in pillar form (like the aboriginal goddess Stambheśvarī) before her cult image, during the Gupta epoch, was given an anthropomorphic form in the guise of two-armed Mahiṣamardinī Durgā. The practice of a Hindu goddess moving alone in a car festival is possibly peculiar to the Śākta *pīṭha* of Virajā only, inasmuch as, in the all-India context, it is generally an incarnation of Śiva or of Viṣṇu who is taken in procession in a decorated chariot, on which the gods are often accompanied by their associated or consort deities. It has been hypothesised that the car festival of goddess Virajā may be the reminiscent of an age-old Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, having originated at the time when Jajpur was an important seat of Tāntric Buddhism. Similar hypotheses have been also advanced in regard to the car festivals that are celebrated every year at Puri and Bhubaneswar respectively.[11]

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[8] W.W. Hunter, 'Orissa under Indian Rule', in N.K. Sahu, ed., *A History of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1956, p. 111.

[9] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, p. 6.

[10] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, pp. 4 and 7.

(c) *Adoration of Gaṇeśa along with Navadurgās* — The Tāntric adoration of Gaṇeśa and the Nine Durgās, symbolised by as many water vessels (*ghaṭas*), is held twice a day (in the morning and at night) from the *Jitāṣṭamī* night to the *Mahālaya Amāvasyā* day. This tradition, closely related to the worship of the life-dispensing waters, appears connected with the Brāhmaṇical ritual practice consisting in adoring the great Goddess after invoking Gaṇeśa.[12] In early medieval Orissa, the image of the elephant-headed god was invariably associated with the sculptural representation of the Divine Mothers, a collective Tāntric personification of the Śākta principle.

(d) *Mahāhoma* (*Great Vedic Sacrifice*) — Starting from the *pañcamī* day till the *Mahāṣṭamī* night, the Vedic oblation (*homa*) known as *mahāhoma* is performed on the sacrificial fire-pit of goddess Virajā (who, according to the myth, was born from one such pit — the *gārhapatya-agni* — at the end of the great Vedic sacrifice celebrated at Jajpur by the god Brahmā in person). During the performance of the ceremony, Gaṇeśa, Brahmā, Śiva, Viṣṇu and Vāsuki (the mythical Nāga king considered to be the lord of infernal regions) are worshipped near the sacrificial pit in the form of five water vessels. The worship of these five deities in association with the great Goddess and with the Vedic form of sacrifice expresses a synthesis between Āryan and non-Āryan cults, which is likely to have assumed its final shape at the time when the *Pañca-devatā-upāsanā* worship system was introduced by the Gaṅgas into the Śākta *pīṭha* presided over by goddess Virajā.[13]

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[11] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, pp. 4-5 and 7.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

[13] *Ibid.*, 5 and 8.

(e) *Mahāṣṭamī rites* — The night of *Mahāṣṭamī* (the eighth day in the bright fortnight of Āśvina), which at other Śākta centres of Orissa marks the culmination of *Durgā-Pūjā* (the sacrifice of the buffalo being generally performed on that very night), is differently celebrated at Virajā temple with the observance of a peculiar ceremony, the *mahāsnāna* (Great Bath of goddess Virajā), which is followed by the adoration of Cāmuṇḍā and the sacrifice of a goat in her honour. At midnight on that night women only are allowed into the temple to perform the ritual bath of the cult image of Virajā. In the opinion of the scholar E. Padhi, the said Śākta religious observances might constitute a ritualistic remnant of the Tantric Buddhist worship-pattern that was probably in vogue at Virajā *kṣetra* in the Bhauma-kara epoch, when the place was an important seat of Vajrayāna Buddhism.[14] On the other hand, it has been already observed that in the Bhauma epoch the Śākta-Tāntric goddess Cāmuṇḍā was, in all likelihood, greatly revered by the Tāntric Buddhist *sādhaka*s of Jajpur, the latter city being then a sort of cross-road for all the different faiths prevalent on the Orissan soil. Association of women with the bathing ceremony of Virajā, with the propitiation of Cāmuṇḍā (which, in the Bhauma epoch, was closely connected with the worship of Mahiṣamardinī), and with animal sacrifices well support the hypothesis of the past prevalence of the Vajrayānic Buddhist ritual at Virajā temple, being the attribution of half-priestly functions to women a typical feature of the Tāntric Buddhist religious tradition rather than of the Brāhmaṇical one.

(f) *Mahānavamī and buffalo-sacrifice* — The most important among the rites being performed in honour of goddess Virajā during the *Durgā-Pūjā* is the sacrifice of a young male buffalo, which, contrary to the custom in vogue as a norm at most Śākta shrines of India, takes place on the night of *Mahānavamī* (the ninth day in the bright fortnight of Āśvina) rather than on that of *Mahāṣṭamī*. This rite marks the end of the whole sixteen-day festival, that is declared over after the midnight called *Mahāniśā* (the Great or Dark Night). The buffalo is decapitated on a sacrificial altar in front of the *jagamohana* of the temple, the door of which is kept closed in that interval so as to prevent the goddess, in a symbolic way, from 'seeing' such a profanation of the vegetarian pureness of her shrine. A permanently appointed man decapitates the animal with the help of a sharp sword called *bhairava* (the terrible). Thereafter, an aromatic drink is offered to Virajā and the temple door is opened again. According to the local priests the blood of the slain buffalo is not directly offered to Virajā, but is rather offered to an ancient image of Aja-Ekapāda-Bhairava serving as the western *pārśva-devatā* of the temple. The latter ritual custom, as it is the case with the closing of the temple door during the sacrifice of the buffalo, was probably introduced to

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[14] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, pp. 5 and 8-9.

> indicate that the goddess has no direct concern with bloodshed and animal sacrifice. Such a religious conception was most likely superimposed on the rituals that were originally observed at Virajā temple during the *Durgā-Pūjā* on the initiative of the Somavaṁśī monarchs, who are reported to have striven to eradicate the most bloody Tāntric practices diffused in Orissa during the Bhauma epoch from their kingdom, and particularly from the city of Jajpur, their capital.[15]

To sum up, the autumnal propitiation of goddess Virajā in the month of Āśvina shows a series of evident traces of the syncretistic and eclectic worship system termed as *Pañca-devatā-upāsanā*, consisting in the simultaneous adoration of the five deities of the traditional Hindu pentad (Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti, Sūrya and Gaṇeśa). The Virajā tradition, by the time of the Imperial Gaṅgas, had embraced both Āryan and non-Āryan religious beliefs and practices, giving rise to a grandiose synthesis of different cult deities in the single great goddess. The traces of Yakṣa cult (the tree-worship underlying the *Navapatrikā* ceremony), Nāga cult (the adoration of Vāsuki along with other Hindu divinities), pillar-worship, pot-worship, are all noticed in the ritualistic pattern followed at the shrine of Virajā during the *Durgā-Pūjā*.

As regards the divinities of the traditional Brāhmaṇical pentad (*pañca-devatā*) venerated at the shrine along with its presiding goddess, Virajā, Śiva is obviously associated from time immemorial with Śakti cult in general, while Viṣṇu is closely associated with Virajā *kṣetra* by virtue of the ancient myth of Gayāsura, the religious meaning of which has been already discussed in chapter 2. Gaṇeśa or Gaṇapati, the sectarian divinity of the Gāṇapatyas, is worshipped on different occasions during the celebration of *Durgā-Pūjā* at the temple of Virajā. Sūrya, the sectarian divinity of the Sauras, is not directly propitiated at the shrine during the festival in question, but his worship has been probably replaced by that of Brahmā. At any rate, the existence of the Sun cult in the Virajā tradition is evinced by the worship pattern observed on the occasion of another important festival celebrated every year in the city of Jajpur, that is, the so-called birthday of goddess Virajā, falling on the new moon day in the month of Māgha (January-February), the *Triveṇī Amāvasyā*.[16]

On the occasion of the birthday ceremony of the goddess, the Mahiṣamardinī image enshrined within the sanctum of Virajā temple is camouflaged with a special dress termed as Sāvitrī-*veśa*. The cult icon is applied with four artificial faces, each of which appears three-eyed, and with ten artificial arms holding different weapons and attributes. A tall crown displaying crescent moon and framed on the back by a golden solar disk is placed on the goddess' head while a swan made of lime mortar is placed beneath her seat.[17] The features

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15. E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, pp. 6, 9 and 11.
16. E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, p. 1.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

of the four faces and of the swan appear directly related to the god Brahmā, of whom Sāvitrī (Solar-Hymn) is traditionally regarded as one of the three *śakti*s along with Gāyatrī (Triple-Hymn) and Sarasvatī (the Flowing-One). These three goddesses, who are but different aspects of the Vedic hymn to the Sun (Savitar), are, moreover, identified with the goddess of speech Vāc, the Mother of the Threefold Veda and the vehicle of knowledge, whose male counterpart is, once again, Brahmā, the source of all knowledge.[18] They are also, at one time, the *śakti*s of the Sun,[19] of whom they personify the creative, beneficent and enlightening energies. Thus, goddess Virajā, when regarded as Brahmāṇī (Brahmā-*śakti*) or as Sāvitrī (Sun-*śakti*) on the occasion of her birthday ceremony, is invoked in the Gāyatrī *mantra*, otherwise known as Sāvitrī *mantra*. She is then being conceived as the active cosmic principle that is inherent in the Sun as well as in Brahmā, the Divine Demiurge.

The concept about the Mahādevī as the supreme solar power that is the source of all wisdom, consciousness, fecundity, propagation, multiplication and dynamism, underlying the celebration of Virajā's birthday festival, appears indebted, for some aspect, to the Sun cult, which was part of the cosmopolitan form of religion patronised by the Gaṅga emperors in the twelfth-fifteenth centuries AD to integrate all of the currents of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism then existing in Orissa into the all-inclusive Jagannātha cult. On the other hand, also the ancient myth justifying the celebration of such an unusual 'birthday festival', i.e., the one relating to Virajā's birth from the sacrificial fire-altar of Brahmā in the noon of the new moon day of the month of Māgha,[20] lays emphasis upon the 'solar' characteristics of the goddess, who is described as having the brightness of the celestial light of millions of suns. The mythological association of goddess Virajā with Brahmā might be at the origin of the identification of the sacred *tīrtha* of Jajpur as Brahmā *kṣetra*,[21] as well as of the equalisation, operated by the great fifteenth-century Oriyā poet Sāralā Dāsa in his *Caṇḍī Purāṇa*, of goddess Virajā to Brāhmī (meant as one of the names of the *śakti* of Brahmā).[22]

In conclusion, it can be maintained that the medieval links of Virajā cult with each of the sectarian trends of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, its far more ancient ties with both the indigenous and the Āryanised forms of ancestor-worship connected with the sanctity of the river Vaitarani (see chapter 2), its retaining many an aspect of the proto-Śākta traditions in vogue among the tribals since pre-historic times — buffalo-sacrifice, the worship of pillar-deities, etc. —

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[18] A. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, New York, 1964, pp. 260-1.

[19] A. Boner, S.R. Sharma and R. P. Das, *New Light on the Sun Temple at Koṇārak*, Varanasi, 1972, p. 32.

[20] *Brahmā Tantra* quoted in E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, p. 1.

[21] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

[22] P. Acharya, *Studies in Orissan History, Archaeology and Archives*, Cuttack, 1969, p. 284.

side by side with the Śākta-Tāntric rituals elaborated in the historical period, contributed as a whole to make Virajā temple the holiest and most celebrated Śākta *pīṭha* of Orissa.

Thus, goddess Virajā, venerated for centuries by the Bhauma and Somavaṁśī kings as their tutelary deity and the protectress of their capital city, Jajpur, and later on raised to the status of chief representative of the Śakti principle in the context of the syncretistic worship system patronised by the Gaṅga and Sūryavaṁśī emperors, is still today regarded by the Hindus of all creed as the most important Śākta goddess of the State.

Puruṣottama or Puri

Puruṣottama or Śrī *kṣetra*, with Vimalā as the *Pīṭha-Devī*, finds mention in the Purāṇas as one of the important Śākta *pīṭhas* of India.

Vimalā (the Stainless-One) is the most important goddess of the Jagannātha temple complex at Puri. Her renowned shrine, situated in the south-west corner of the inner enclosure of the complex, is mentioned in some Hindu sacred texts (for instance, in the *Matsya Purāṇa*, Ch. 13)[23] as one among the most sacred Śākta *pīṭhas* of India. The Śāktas consider Vimalā the real presiding deity of Śrī *kṣetra* (the holy ground surrounding Jagannātha temple on four sides and otherwise known as Puruṣottama *kṣetra*, i.e., the city of Puri itself), and that Lord Jagannātha is merely her Bhairava (the terrific manifestation of Śiva traditionally associated with each goddess presiding over a Śākta *pīṭha* of her own).[24]

The present temple of Vimalā, a four-chambered structure dating back to the Imperial Gaṅga period like most of the edifices lying within the Jagannātha temple compound,[25] was most probably built on the foundations of an earlier Śākta shrine dedicated to the same goddess. It is stated in the *Mādalā Pāñji* (the temple chronicle compiled by the priests of Jagannātha) that the first temple of Vimalā was erected by a Somavaṁśī king named Yayāti — the text omits to specify whether he was Yayāti I (*ca.* AD 922-55) or Yayāti II (*ca.* AD 1025-1040) — at the time of construction of a temple dedicated to Puruṣottama/Jagannātha, now no longer extant, which preceded the existing one, built by the great king Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga in the first half of the twelfth century AD.[26] Yet the original shrine of Vimalā might have been established at a still earlier date by the Bhauma-kara monarchs, who were particularly prone to patronise the building of Tāntric cult edifices, both Brāhmaṇical and

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[23] V.S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa — A Study*, Varanasi, 1963, pp. 105-7.

[24] M.M. Ganguly, *Orissa and Her Remains — Ancient and Mediæval (District Puri)*, Calcutta and London, 1912, pp. 425-6.

[25] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

[26] K.N. Mahapatra, 'Antiquities of Jagannātha-Puri as a Place of Pilgrimage', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. III, No 1, p. 14; N.K. Sahu, 'History of Kośala and the Somavaṁśīs of Utkala', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. III, No. 3, p. 134.

Buddhist, and are, furthermore, credited by some scholars with the construction of the first temple of Jagannātha at Puri in around the eighth-ninth centuries AD.[27] In this last connection, the image of goddess Vimalā enshrined within the temple sanctum bears some typical iconographic characteristics leading one to assign it to the Bhauma art phase. This four-armed cult image represents a standing Devī displaying *varada* with her lower right hand and holding, respectively, a rosary with her upper right, the miniature figure of a worshipping mermaid (or of a *nāgī* in therioanthropomorphic form) in the upper left, and a drinking vessel in the lower left. The goddess is three-eyed like Śiva and wears a crown. Two naked and very fierce-looking female attendants flank her on either side.[28] Except for the figure of mermaid or *nāgakanyā* — a probable symbol of the association of Vimalā with the Nāga mytho-symbolical plexus — the other objects and hand poses displayed by the goddess are identical to the ones appearing in the Pārvatī images carved by the Orissan artists in the eighth-tenth centuries AD. Thus, the cult image of Vimalā conforms, under many aspects, to the iconography of Pārvatī as current in Orissa during the Bhauma period. The characteristics of this cult image, indeed, are purely Śākta-Tāntric, as is the standard for all the Devī images having been carved at that stage of Orissan history, which was marked for the ascent of the Śaiva-Śākta creed all over the country.

The *Devī Purāṇa* (Ch. 50) prescribes that goddess Vimalā should be depicted as seated on a human corpse like Cāmuṇḍā,[29] but yet this typically Tāntric feature is not found in the iconography of Vimalā of Puri. At any rate, what is of interest here is that no Vaiṣṇavite feature can be noticed in the image of Vimalā, although the shrine dedicated to this deity is situated in the premises of the most important Vaiṣṇavite pilgrimage centre of Orissa. As a matter of fact, the Śāktas do not worship Vimalā as a Vaiṣṇavī Śakti, but rather as Tripurā Bhairavī (the Terror-of-the-Universe), who is the consort of Śiva in his most destructive aspect (Kāla Bhairava). She is the *śakti* of Śiva when the god assumes the form of the all-pervading Lord of Death, and it is she, embodying the dynamic power of the god, who actually carries on the merciless work of death.[30] Tripurā Bhairavī is, thus, conceptually identical to the all-disgregating and all-destroying form of the Goddess, Mahākālī, identified with the metaphysical energy causing the dissolution of the universe at the end of each cosmic age (*mahāpralaya*). This terrible female deity, embodying the Power of Death and often considered as a demonic being in the popular forms of cult, is nevertheless worshipped at Puri in her pure and ascetic form, namely, in her Vimalā-*rūpa* (to a great extent corresponding, from the iconographic point of view, to the non-fearful image of Pārvatī).

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[27] H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXX, Nos. 2, 3 and 4: Glimpses of Orissan Art and Culture, p. 133.

[28] K.C. Mishra, *The Cult of Jagannātha*, 2nd rev. edn., Calcutta, 1984, p. 112.

[29] R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, II, Calcutta, 1963, p. 52, note 131.

[30] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *Dizionario dell'Induismo*, Roma, 1980, p. 442.

In spite of the peaceful aspect shown by the cult icon of Vimalā, some Oriyā sacred textbooks state that the cosmic waters of the *pralaya* (deluge), in their next cyclical submersion of the universe, will overflow from a tank, called Rohiṇī *kuṇḍa*, which is situated just in front of Vimalā temple. Such an identification of the sacred space occupied by the shrine of goddess Vimalā with the mythic place from which the destruction of this universe will start, cannot be mere chance but, on the contrary, suggests a virtual identification of Vimalā with Tripurā Bhairavī, the causer of the *pralaya.*

The numerous literary mentions of Puruṣottama *kṣetra* (or *tīrtha*) as a place where Lord Jagannātha acts as Bhairava and Vimalā as Bhairavī, found in different Tāntric works,[31] besides indicating a syncreticism of creed by virtue of which the culture of Jagannātha has evolved in course of ages into an amalgamation of Śaiva, Śākta and Vaiṣṇava cultic elements, could be otherwise reminiscent of the possible initial prevalence of a mixed, Śaiva-Śākta form of religion at the *kṣetra* of Puri prior to its Vaiṣṇavisation. In fact, in a number of ancient Tantric texts Bhairava is referred to as Jagannātha (Lord-of-the-Universe) — a generic epithet designating the Supreme Godhead and susceptible to being applied to both Śiva and Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa.[32] In other words, the paired divinities Śiva-Bhairava (who in the Tāntric tradition is also known as Jagannātha) and Vimalā-Bhairavī were perhaps worshipped in ancient times as the representatives of the principles of Puruṣa (male) and Śakti (female) at the *tīrtha* of Puri in Orissa, but in a subsequent time, with the establishment of the Somavaṁśī rule over the coastal areas of the country, Viṣṇu/Jagannātha and his consort Lakṣmī took respectively their place as the presiding male and female deity of the *tīrtha* itself.

During the Bhauma period, when the shrine of Vimalā is likely to have risen to eminence as a famous Śākta *pīṭha*, it was a religious norm in Orissa to worship the Śakti, whatever form she might assume, in the company of one or more Bhairavas, who were regarded as her 'guardians', being the terrific manifestations of her divine consort Śiva. This was the case at Bhubaneswar, where the Vaitāl Deul provides the example of a cult image of Cāmuṇḍā accompanied by a gruesome image of Bhairava, and also at Jajpur, where the presiding goddess of the place, Virajā (otherwise known as Kātyāyanī, another malignant aspect of the Devī), is associated from ancient times through rituals and legends with four Bhairavas, regarded as the guardians of the different directions of her *kṣetra.*[33] Also the *yoginī*s of Hirapur are accompanied by four Bhairavas. The hypothesis, thus, appears plausible that, during the Bhauma-kara period, goddess Vimalā of Śrī kṣetra, like many other fearful manifestations of Śakti venerated by the Oriyās of that period, may have been associated in temple rituals with some form of Śiva-Bhairava (perhaps represented in the cultus by the *liṅga* of blue stone that is believed by some scholars to have been one of the formative symbols of the Brāhmaṇical Trinity venerated at Puri).[34] It appears clear, however, that in the Somavaṁśī period the Śākta shrine of goddess Vimalā (worshipped or not along with an associated Bhairava) was totally incorporated into the newly-built temple complex of Jagannātha, dominated by Vaiṣṇavism.

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[31] D.C. Sircar, 'The Śākta Pīṭhas', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters*, vol. XIV (1948), No. 1, p. 45; K.C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

[32] K.C. Dash, 'A Study on the Origin of Ratha Yātrā in Puruṣottama Kṣetra', unpublished paper.

[33] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

That the cult of Vimalā originated in a purely Śākta context is demonstrated by the animal sacrifices being celebrated every year inside her temple in the course of the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā*. During this Śākta festival, on each of the three consecutive nights of *Mahāsaptamī*, *Mahāṣṭamī* and *Mahānavamī*, fish specially caught from the Narendra tank at Puri (where ordinarily no net may be thrown) are offered to the goddess. Moreover, on the *Mahāṣṭamī* night a goat (of the male sex like the canonical sacrificial buffalo of the Śāktas) is killed in honour of the goddess and then offered her by the priests through a secret passage admitting into her temple. The sacrifice is performed at midnight, when the temple of Jagannātha is closed. This offering is not directly presented to Vimalā, but rather to an image of Dakṣiṇa Kālī enshrined within the *jagamohana* of her temple. This sacrificial activity is the only surviving vestige of the ancient Śākta rites, involving the outpouring of blood, in the cult of Jagannātha.[35] W.W. Hunter, who wrote his notes about these sacrifices in the nineteenth century, opined

> Jagannātha has, in short, paid the penalty of his constant compromises with the viler phases of Hinduism. He has included every deity within his walls, and he has been held responsible for the accumulated abominations of all. . . . So deeply rooted is the principle of compromise in this great national temple, that the sacred enclosure also contains a shrine to Vimalā, the 'stainless' queen of the All-Destroyer [Śiva], who is every year adored with midnight rites and bloody sacrifices.[36]

More correctly speaking, the secret nocturnal sacrifice performed at Vimalā temple during the *Mahāṣṭamī* night is an important trace of Śāktism at Śrī *kṣetra*. In fact, during the *Durgā-Pūjā* Vimalā is regarded as an aspect of Durgā, or better as Bhairavī, her own full-form (*pūrṇa-rūpa*), and her image is, accordingly, dressed with red garments as suits goddess Tripurā Bhairavī according to the *Kālikā Purāṇa* (74.90-94).[37] For the same reason, in those particular days of the year she must even be propitiated with animal sacrifices, although on any other occasion ritual bloodshed is considered a profanation of the sanctity of the great temple of Puri. The compromise between the bloody practices of Śāktism and the vegetarian pureness and non-injury ideals of Vaiṣṇavism was here achieved through the secrecy of the sacrifice itself and the device of the formal acceptance of the same by a subordinate deity of the shrine (Dakṣiṇa Kālī) rather than by its presiding goddess (Vimalā).

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[34] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[35] L.S.S. O'Malley, *Puri District Gazetteer*, New Delhi, reprint 1984, pp. 100-1; K. C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

[36] W.W. Hunter, 'Orissa under Indian Rule', in N. K. Sahu, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 137-8; Id., 'Jagannath', *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[37] D. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, Delhi (etc.), 1986, p. 147.

Another line of research, propounded by an Orissan scholar,[38] traces the origin of both the goddesses Vimalā and Subhadrā (the latter being considered the 'sister' of Jagannātha and Balabhadra, whose wooden images are worshipped in the sanctum of the main temple of the Puri complex along with that of Subhadrā herself) back to the cult of Ekānaṁśā Durgā, which might have become popular at Śrī *kṣetra* in the epoch preceding its Vaiṣṇavisation.

Ekānaṁśā, whose name means 'the Single-Portionless-One',[39] is an aspect of Durgā that was anciently identified with Kuhū, the Vedic personification of the new moon.[40] Since the origin of the name Kuhū is Austro-Asiatic,[41] it appears probable that the figure of Ekānaṁśā Durgā evolved out of that of some new-moon goddess initially venerated by the non-Āryan peoples of eastern India and later on adopted into the Vedic pantheon. The name Ekānaṁśā, formed by the juxtaposition of the Sanskrit words *eka* (single, lonely) and *anaṁśa* (portionless, not entitled to share in an inheritance), suggests an image of emptiness, solitude and absence of light (i.e., the moon's 'inheritance') corresponding to the common experience of the new moon nights. Kuhū/Ekānaṁśā was evidently a malignant and inauspicious Brāhmaṇical personification of the darkest night in the revolution of the moon round the earth. Her concept was possibly borrowed by the Vedic Āryans from the ancient Munda-speaking peoples. Most of the female-oriented religions that, according to a section of scholars, predominated in proto-historic epochs in different areas of the world appear to have established some kind of a mystical link between the different phases of the moon, the cycle of menstrual blood and the stages of manifestation of the power of a 'cosmic' Goddess, experienced as one thing by primitive women.[42] The Tāntric goddess Kālī, whose cult is dominated by the symbolism of blood, is associated, like the Vedic Kuhū, with the new moon (*amāvasyā*) nights, all of which are regarded as sacred to her. In the *Harivaṁśa*'s mythical account of the birth of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, her celestial brothers, Ekānaṁśā is, in her turn, identified with Kālī, here called

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[38] M.P. Dash, 'Inter Relations between Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism in Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XI, No. 4, pp. 273-81.

[39] M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, new edn., Oxford, 1988, p. 230.

[40] J.N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd edn., Calcutta, 1956, p. 133.

[41] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, New Delhi, 1974, p. 18.

[42] J. Voss, *La luna nera. Il potere della donna e la simbologia del ciclo femminile*, Como, 1996, pp. 163 ff.

Nidrā (Sleep) and identified with the *māyā* power inherent in Viṣṇu.[43]

Thus Ekānaṁśā, the Brāhmaṇical equivalent of the Vedic new-moon goddess Kuhū, can be considered as a form of Kālī (and, at the same time, of Durgā) who, starting from the Gupta period, became closely associated with Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa. The cult of Ekānaṁśā appears to have gained great importance in the Pāla empire of Bengal, where this goddess was canonically worshipped along with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma as per Purāṇic tradition.[44] The nexus of Ekānaṁśā with Kālī and Durgā kept a tenuous link between Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism also at Puri in Orissa, where the name of this goddess, if the hypothesis under discussion holds good, was nevertheless changed by the Vaiṣṇavas into Subhadrā (a name designating the sister of Kṛṣṇa who became the wife of Arjuna) so as to suppress the evident Śākta references implicit in the use of the name Ekānaṁśā to indicate the divine sister of Jagannātha and Balabhadra.

Yet, it may be inferred that Ekānaṁśā Durgā, under the name of Vimalā, went on being worshipped through Tāntric rites by the Śākta devotees of medieval Kaliṅga even after Vaiṣṇavism superimposed Śāktism and Śaivism at Śrī *kṣetra* around the tenth century AD. By that time, the Vaiṣṇavised aspect of Ekānaṁśā appears to have started being worshipped as Subhadrā in the sanctum of Jagannātha temple while the purely Śākta-Tāntric aspect of Ekānaṁśā may have continued being worshipped as Vimalā in a subsidiary shrine built in the temple premises. This could be the true purport of the assertion of the Śāktas, according to which goddess Vimalā is the real presiding deity of Śrī *kṣetra*.

The two above expounded hypotheses concerning the origin of the shrine of Vimalā at Puri, the one tracing it back to the establishment of a Śākta *pīṭha* where Bhairavī (i.e., the Devī) was called Vimalā and her Bhairava (i.e., Śiva) was called Jagannātha, the other tracing it back to the Śākta-Tāntric cult of Ekānaṁśā Durgā, having later on evolved into two separate cults (that of Vimalā, still genuinely Śākta-Tāntric, and that of Subhadrā, radically Vaiṣṇavised), do not seem to contradict each other. In either case, indeed, a Śākta shrine dedicated to some fearful or malignant manifestation of the great Goddess is stated to have been established at Śrī *kṣetra* much prior to the ascent of Vaiṣṇavism there in the form of Jagannātha cult. Vimalā is likely to have been worshipped at Puri since the epoch in which the Austro-Asiatic Saoras were numerous in the neighbouring districts. It is probable that the Bhauma monarchs were responsible for the Sanskritisation of Vimalā cult, but yet the latter's origin should be better sought in the female-oriented cults once diffused among the autochthonous tribes that inhabited the Puri area since pre-historic times.

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[43] M. Biardeau, *L'Induismo. Antropologia di una civiltā*, Milano, 1985, pp. 164-5; W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, pp. 218 ff.

[44] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 503.

The acknowledgement, even on the part of the Vaiṣṇava devotees of Lord Jagannātha, of the place of pre-eminence having been enjoyed from the hoary past by goddess Vimalā at Śrī *kṣetra* is revealed by the ritualistic procedure that is followed at Jagannātha temple for the consecration of the *mahāprasāda*, the holy food blessed by the Lord, which is believed to free those who take it from all sins. In fact, the simple *bhoga* (vegetarian food offerings), which is fancied to be personally cooked by Lakṣmī (Jagannātha's consort goddess) in the edifice housing the temple kitchen, becomes *mahāprasāda* proper only after it is offered to Vimalā. Failing such a presentation of offerings, the holy food cannot be blessed by Lord Jagannātha and distributed among the devotees.[45] It appears, thus, clear that the Vaiṣṇavas of Orissa revere to the utmost the purificatory and benedictory power of the ancient Śākta goddess they call Vimalā, to whom they collectively entrust their hope for spiritual liberation.

The Śākta significance of Śrī or Puruṣottama *kṣetra* as a Śākta *pīṭha* is further accentuated by the installation and veneration of several other goddesses such as Bānkimuhāṇa Rāmacaṇḍī (a six-armed Mahiṣamardinī image), Vārāhī at Balisahi, Saptamātṛkās on the edge of Mārkaṇḍeśvara tank, Śyāmakālī near the old royal palace, Lakṣmī and Maṅgalā within the premises of Jagannātha temple, and many many others. The sole Jagannātha temple complex encloses within its compound wall innumerable shrines, small and big, dedicated to female deities. In course of time, under the all-pervasive influence of Jagannātha cult, the whole of Orissa has been organised in an integrated Śākta province called Utkala Śākta Maṇḍala, having Śrī *kṣetra* (with Vimalā as Bhairavī and Jagannātha as Bhairava) as its centre. Seven 'layers' (*āvaraṇa*) of *pīṭhas*, extending up to Bhubaneswar, encircle and protect the *pīṭha* presided over by Vimalā. The *saptāvaraṇa* area includes thirty-five important manifestations of Śakti and nineteen of Śiva. Beyond the limit of this area there are sixteen great *pīṭhas* (which include the eight traditional Caṇḍī *pīṭhas* discussed in this chapter), spread over the entire State of Orissa. The so structured Utkala Śākta Maṇḍala is, thus, made coincide with the territory of historical Orissa (Utkala).[46]

Kakatpur

Among the eight traditional Caṇḍī *pīṭhas* of Orissa, the shrine of Maṅgalā (the Auspicious-One) at Kakatpur, a centre of Puri district situated on the eastern bank of the river Prachi, is the one where the Vaiṣṇava doctrines and rituals — which, starting from the Gaṅga epoch, formed the essence of Jagannātha cult — have more influenced the Śākta theological conceptions and worship practices.

Although dating, in its present forms, only from the fifteenth century AD, the temple of

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[45] K.C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

[46] T. Mishra, 'The Sakti Cult and Its Salient Features in Orissa', in K.C. Mishra, T. Mishra and R.K. Mishra, eds., *Studies in Saktism*, Bhubaneswar, 1995, pp. 144-5.

Maṅgalā was certainly built on the ruins of a more ancient Śākta shrine.[47] Since its presiding deity is represented by an image of the Buddhist goddess Tārā assigned to about the tenth century AD[48] (the period of transition from the Bhauma-kara to the Somavaṁśī rule over coastal Orissa), the *pīṭha* of Maṅgalā is likely to have gained popularity from at least the initial part of the Somavaṁśī period. By that time Buddhism faced a sort of disintegration in the Prachi Valley area as well as in the whole of Orissa, so that the old images of Mahāyāna Buddhist *devas* and *devīs* started being venerated by the Hindu folk as the images of Brāhmaṇical divinities. Following the new trend Maṅgalā, a folk goddess personifying auspiciousness, may have been incorporated into the regional Hindu pantheon of Orissa on the initiative of the Somavaṁśī monarchs, the great revivers of Hinduism in Orissa, who may also have installed the said Tārā image, wonderfully carved out of chlorite schist and bearing the unmistakable mark of the later Bhauma art phase, as the presiding deity of the great Śākta temple of Kakatpur.

The worshipped image of Mother Maṅgalā approximates to the iconography of the Mahāyāna Buddhist goddess Sītātapatrī Tārā.[49] It represents a four-armed Devī seated in *lalitāsana* on a double lotus cushion (*viśvapadma*) below which is a row of eight female figures with accessories for worship. The goddess is crowned with a tall *kirīṭa-mukuṭa* and is adorned with very big earrings. Her upper right hand holds a disk while the lower right holds a rosary. She holds a blooming lotus in her upper left hand while an unidentifiable object is placed in her lower left, shown in the attitude of counting. As regards the mystic meaning of such attributes, the disk is generally identified by the people with the full moon (*pūrṇacandra*), a symbol of astro-cosmic totality, while the rosary (*akṣamālā*) consisting of twenty-seven beads may represent the as many lunar mansions or *nakṣatras*, the chronological determination of which was at the basis of the various Indian ritual calendars.[50] Some of the iconographic features of this masterpiece of Tāntric Buddhist art of Orissa lay, thus, emphasis on the primeval 'lunar' aspect of the supreme female principle, with this tallying with the deep nature of the great Goddess of the Hindus as well.

An interesting odd account of goddess Maṅgalā's origin is traced from Sāralā Dāsa's poem *Caṇḍī Purāṇa*, which relates that Mahādevī Durgā, in her fierce combat against the buffalo-demon, was not able to overpower the latter (who was illusively appearing in various forms before her, sometimes eloping himself from her eyes) until the gods created the benign goddess Maṅgalā. She directed Durgā to undress and be naked so that, at the sudden sight of her *yoni* (genital organ), Mahiṣāsura would be totally powerless and, in this condition, could be killed easily. The expedient planned by Maṅgalā was so successful, that the demon was immediately killed by Durgā.[51] As the presiding deity of prosperity and happiness and bestower of all desires, specially venerated by the womenfolk, Maṅgalā is described in some Tāntric texts as sixteen years old and ever youthful, her eyes resembling blue lilies. She is furthermore stated to be a variant form of Durgā.[52] On the occasion of the ritual fast called *Khudurukuṇī Oṣa*, observed by unmarried Oriyā girls in the lunar month of Bhādrapada (August-September), Maṅgalā is, in fact, worshipped in association with Durgā in the form of a composite female deity named Khudurukuṇī. Nevertheless, the iconographic features shown by Maṅgalā of Kakatpur do not correspond at all to Durgā's ones, nor do they approximate to the descriptions of goddess Maṅgalā given in various religious texts. The cult icon presiding over the *pīṭha* of Kakatpur is, in all evidence, an unique piece of sculptural art, with this putting credit in the hypothesis of its Buddhistic origin.

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[47] P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report 1974-75: Prachi Valley*, Bhubaneswar, 1975, p. 20.

[48] Orally from Dr. H.C. Das.

[49] Orally from Dr. H.C. Das.

[50] P.K. Ray, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 20 and 60.

A legend runs in the Prachi Valley that the representative image of Mother Maṅgalā was carried by sea to Kakatpur by a rich Oriyā *sādhava* (merchant) coming from Ceylon. During the early medieval period, indeed, the merchants of Orissa were carrying on naval trade with the island of Ceylon as well as with the South-East Asian countries. Kakatpur was in those days one of the most important among the ancient small river-ports situated along the course of the Prachi, which connected the heart of the Orissan kingdom with the Bay of Bengal. The tradition about the import of the Maṅgalā image from Ceylon is, however, devoid of any historical truth, for the image in question is, in all evidence, a pure specimen of Orissan sculptural art.[53] The legend under discussion was probably created to connect the shrine of Maṅgalā at Kakatpur with the past maritime glory of the Prachi Valley in such a way as to give much more importance to the shrine itself. Furthermore, it does not appear unlikely that the fancied Ceylonese origin of the Maṅgalā image be actually reminiscent of the latter's primarily Buddhistic character, inasmuch as Ceylon was, in all ages, a great centre of the Buddhist religion. In the Bhauma period the *sādhavas* of Orissa were the chief supporters of Buddhism, so much so that the image of the Buddhist Tārā that would have later on represented Maṅgalā of Kakatpur came naturally to be associated by the people with the maritime activities carried on by the *sādhava* communities active in the Prachi Valley. One of the eight perils from which Tārā was anciently believed to protect her devotees was shipwrecking, which circumstance made this goddess the patroness of sea traders. In a subsequent time, when the Tārā image in question was converted into the presiding deity of a Brāhmaṇical Śākta *pīṭha*, this function was transferred, without solution of continuity, to the Hindu goddess Maṅgalā.

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[51] Orally from Dr. H.C. Das.

[52] H.C. Das, 'Religious History of Balasore', in S. Pani and H.C. Das, eds., *Glimpses of History and Culture of Balasore*, Bhubaneswar, 1988, p. 274.

[53] P.K. Ray, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 44 and 60.

The *pārśva-devatās* (side deities) of the temple are Viṣṇu, Varāha, Nṛsiṁha and Cāmuṇḍā. Of these images, only the last mentioned one belonged to the original Śākta shrine (subsequently rebuilt), while those of the three Vaiṣṇava deities, coming from some collapsed Viṣṇu temple, were affixed to the walls of the present Maṅgalā temple when the latter had already become the seat of a syncretistic, Śākta-Vaiṣṇava form of worship.[54]

The throne upon which the cult image of goddess Maṅgalā is placed has been built in such a way as to allow the first rays of the rising sun to fall at her feet every morning, causing the image to dazzle and glow. While praying and meditating before this bright statue always garlanded with hundreds of flowers and embellished with silver ornaments, the pilgrims naturally picture Maṅgalā to themselves as being full of wealth and peace and fulfilling all their desires, since she is above all the goddess who bestows auspiciousness on her devotees and cares for their welfare.

It must be mentioned that goddess Maṅgalā, although primarily venerated at the renowned Śākta *pīṭha* of Kakatpur, plays an important role in the context of the standardised folk religion in the entire State of Orissa, particularly in the village level. She was initially an autochthonous goddess who, in course of centuries, entered the fold of the Hindu religion by virtue of a process of Sanskritisation of her cult. The worship of Maṅgalā, adopted also by the Buddhists and Jainas of the medieval period, is very common in every Hindu village of Orissa, where this deity is often found represented by one or more small stones placed under a sacred tree or, alternatively, by a pot filled with water (*maṅgala-kalaśa*), which is taken as a symbol of good omen. But she is also, at the same time, worshipped in the Hindu temples in the shape of a regular cult icon associated with Brāhmaṇical *pūjā* rites.

Animal sacrifices of the tribal or folk type were once widely associated with the worship of Maṅgalā, yet the gradual conversion of upper-class people to her worship and the parallel indoctrination of semi-tribal village communities to vegetarian food habits have progressively made this kind of sacrificial activity take a back seat. Thus, Maṅgalā has become accepted by the Hindus of all walks of life as an auspicious folk deity.[55] As observed by the Orissan scholar R.N. Dash, the ritual fast known as *Maṅgalvār Oṣa*, observed on Tuesdays by a large number of Oriyās belonging to all castes, and especially by the womenfolk, represents the final outcome of the process of Sanskritisation of Maṅgalā cult.

> The stories associated with it narrate the conflict of tribal and other religious practices. In one of them the Kapila cow is killed as an offering to the ancestors. For this the king was enraged and punished the offender, who is a *sādhava* (merchant), by killing

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54. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

55. R.N. Dash, 'Folk Festivals of Orissa — A Study', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXIII, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 71.

> his sons. So also these folk stories narrate the conflict between the scavenger women's Maṅgalā worship to the dissatisfaction and the anger of the king; and the Saora women's worship and the rage of the king. But in each case it has been shown that the king has accepted the worship of Maṅgalā for his own benefit. This proves beyond doubt that the strong mother goddess belief behind this and the devotion of the women worshippers of these deities have made the other religious practitioners bow before the folk customs identified in the same. Though in course of time the nature of offerings has changed and the sacrificed animals have been replaced to suit the non-violent religious believers, yet the worship continues with its dominant character.[56]

The ancient origin of the cult of Maṅgalā at Kakatpur is still today traceable in the sacrifices of goats, sheep or fowls that take place in the premises of the temple on the occasion of *Durgā-Pūjā* and on that of *Jhāmu Yātrā*, the famous fire-walking festival held at Kakatpur on the last Tuesday in the month of Caitra (March-April). At any rate, since this Śākta deity, owing to the influence of Jagannātha cult, has been long since worshipped as Parama-Vaiṣṇavī (the Supreme Śakti of the Vaiṣṇavas, to whom only vegetable offerings can be made),[57] the sacrificial animals are not offered to her, but are, on the contrary, offered to an ancient Cāmuṇḍā image affixed to the temple south wall and worshipped as Dakṣiṇa Caṇḍī. An analogous ritualistic pattern is followed in the premises of Jagannātha temple at Puri, where, on the *Mahāṣṭamī* night during the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā*, goddess Vimalā is offered with a ram which, instead of being directly presented before her, is offered before an image of Dakṣiṇa Kālī enshrined in the *jagamohana* of her temple. In this connection, L.S.S. O'Malley remarks that certain *grāma-devatās* of Puri district, regarded as Parama-Vaiṣṇavīs or devoted followers of Viṣṇu and, as such, normally not to be propitiated with animal sacrifices, are believed by their votaries to long for offerings of blood and flesh on special ceremonial occasions.[58] Also the far more eminent goddesses Maṅgalā of Kakatpur and Vimalā of Puri appear to come within this case.

As earlier suggested, the Vaiṣṇavisation of Maṅgalā cult was probably started by the Somavaṁśī kings, the first great royal sponsors of the cult of Jagannātha. The influence of the Jagannātha culture was increasingly felt at the Śākta sanctuary of Kakatpur in the subsequent Imperial Gaṅga period.

Maṅgalā, originally a tribal goddess, came, thus, to be conceived as Ādi Śakti, the primordial active female principle in which no duality exists and all opposites are reconciled. This theological term indicates the unmanifest state of Śakti as abstract Time before the unfolding of a new world through the creative process that is always initiated by Viṣṇu; as soon as the creative process starts, distinctions arise in the manifested forms of the Goddess, all of which, at the time of the dissolution of the world (*pralaya*), again become converted into Ādi Śakti.[59] The above-mentioned iconographic features, the full moon and the rosary symbolising the twenty-seven *nakṣatras*, which distinguish the cult image of Mother Maṅgalā from that of any other Hindu goddess of Orissa, well express the nature of an astro-cosmic divinity conceived as identical to Ādi Śakti, the aspect of the Goddess as the metaphysical beginning of all things. That the representative image of Maṅgalā of Kakatpur was carved by Buddhist sculptors does not appear relevant in this respect; what appears important is, on the contrary, the way the Hindu devotees have been viewing and adoring this cult icon since it was installed as the presiding deity of the Brāhmaṇical Śākta shrine of Kakatpur.

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[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

[57] P.K. Ray, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[58] L.S.S. O'Malley, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

The concept of Ādi Śakti, embodied on an elevated spiritual plane by goddess Maṅgalā, resembles that of Yogamāyā, the divinity personifying the cosmic power of delusion which directly emanates from the supreme *Brahman*. This abstract form of the female principle was conceived by some medieval Śākta schools as the divine mother of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, the three members of the Hindu Trimūrti. Since the three members of the Trinity of Puri — Jagannātha, Balabhadra and Subhadrā — are generally identified by the Hindus with Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā respectively, it follows that goddess Maṅgalā of Kakatpur, once she was identified with Ādi Śakti or Yogamāyā, started being regarded — perhaps on the initiative of the Imperial Gaṅgas — as the divine mother of Lord Jagannātha and his 'brothers'. Only from this point of view this Śākta deity is being venerated as a Vaiṣṇavī Śakti or Parama-Vaiṣṇavī, as is clear from the codified rituals observed at her shrine. Maṅgalā, therefore, must not be confused with a form of Viṣṇu's divine consort Lakṣmī.

A very important link between the cult of Maṅgalā and that of Jagannātha is represented by the festival called *Navakalevara* ('new build-up' or 'assuming new bodies'), held in every twelve to nineteen years in the month of Āṣāḍha (June-July) according to a complicated calculation of dates based on the lunar calendar. On the occasion of this most sacred ceremony, the three idols representing the Puri Trinity, which are made of *nīm* wood (*Azadirachta indica*), are to be replaced by new ones. The work of collecting logs of wood for carving the new images starts in the month of Caitra (March-April). The Daita priests of Śrī Jagannātha, who claim their descent from Śavara lineage and are considered to be the kinsfolk of the Lord,[60] are appointed by the *rājā* of Puri and by the temple brāhmaṇas to go searching for the trees to be used for making the new images. They then proceed on foot to the temple of Maṅgalā at Kakatpur, where they are welcomed with a great religious procession. They spend some days in the temple worshipping, invoking, and meditating on the goddess in order that she may visit them in dream and give them indications about the places where to look for the holy *nīm* trees. According to the order received from Maṅgalā in dream, the next day the Daita priests go to the places so located in the forest or in the open ground, select the trees, perform sacrificial functions along with some brāhmaṇas, sit in meditation for three days, get the trees cut into logs by some carpenters, and finally carry the holy logs to Jagannātha temple at Puri by making use of wooden cars that are pulled by them themselves and by groups of devoted people from Kakatpur.[61]

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[59] M. Stutley, *Hinduism: The Eternal Law*, New Delhi, 1993, p. 122.

[60] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

As already observed in chapter 1, the periodic ritual resort to this kind of religious-pattern dreams inspired by the great Goddess — in this particular case, in her aspect as Maṅgalā — appears to have originated out of shamanistic practices. Dreams revealing the exact spot at which the divine manifests itself, inspired by the great Goddess to her semi-tribal priests, are attached great importance also in the ambit of the cult of Hiṅgulā, another eminent Śākta goddess of Orissa having a tribal origin. Since the Daita priests of Puri are believed to descend, at least for some part of their blood, from the ancient Śavara people of which the Hill Saoras of Orissa perhaps constitute one of the modern branches, it appears plausible to conclude that the standardised ritual of the priests' night stay in Maṅgalā temple, during which the goddess is believed to suggest them in dream the location of the *nīm* trees out of which the new wooden images representing the Jagannātha Trinity are to be carved, has initially drawn its inspiration, at a certain time during the medieval period, from ancient shamanistic practices centring round the sacred value attached by the tribals to dream-life.

Another evidence of the strong influence exerted by the cult of Jagannātha on the *pīṭha* of Kakatpur from the later medieval period onwards is constituted by the tradition according to which goddess Maṅgalā is believed to go everyday to Puri in order to enjoy the *darśana* (sight) of her 'son' Jagannātha. There is a large block of stone inside the *jagamohana* of Maṅgalā temple which is traditionally taken to be the *viśrāma-prastāra* (after-journey resting bed) of the goddess.[62] The temple priests say that Maṅgalā, after returning from Puri, takes rest for some time on this seat every night. The cult object in question is offered with daily *pūjā* and, such as it is reported, gets hollowed at the top day after day as if the goddess had the power to consume the stone which the seat is made of on account of the 'weight' of her invisible celestial body.

A shrine dedicated to Lord Jagannātha is to be found in the premises of Maṅgalā temple at Kakatpur, while a shrine dedicated to goddess Sarvamaṅgalā (a four-armed seated goddess holding *pāśa* and *aṅkuśa* in the upper hands while the lower ones display *varada* and *abhaya*, flanked by her mount the lion at her left leg) is to be found in the Jagannātha temple complex at Puri. The interplay of the cults of Jagannātha and Maṅgalā has been, thus, sealed through the erection of a subsidiary shrine dedicated to the other deity in each of the two respective temple compounds.

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[61] D.N. Patnaik, *Festivals of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1982, pp. 44-5.

[62] P.K. Ray, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Two other meaningful cult elements testifying to the great influence exerted by Vaiṣṇavism on the Śākta *pīṭha* of Kakatpur, especially from the later medieval period onwards, are respectively the acting of a pair of brass images of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as the composite processional image of Maṅgalā on the occasion of a series of festivals, and the ritual recitation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* — the holiest and most popular Vaiṣṇava sacred textbook — at a special spot located within the temple compound.

Maṅgalā is daily worshipped through a very elaborate ceremonial in the ambit of which aesthetic values and vegetarian traditions appear to be pre-eminent. The goddess receives six different food offerings and changes three different dresses everyday. The main offerings consist of boiled rice, fried paddy or vegetables, coconut, fruit salad, curd, curries, etc. The cult image of Maṅgalā is, furthermore, bathed daily with the holy scented water known as *paduka* (Hindi *padodak*), which is composed by an admixture of ghee, curd, milk, sugar, camphor, sandal and flowers. The evening ceremony held at the temple, when an offering of lamps is made to Maṅgalā, is the most spectacular one. The rite is accompanied by the loud sound of the drums, gongs, bells and horns played by the temple servants. Similar ceremonies are observed at other eminent Śākta shrines of Orissa, such as, just to make some examples, Sāralā temple at Jhankad and Tārā-Tāriṇī temple in Ganjam district.

In addition to her usual everyday dresses, the goddess assumes two different special dresses on two special ceremonial occasions of the year. At the time of *Snāna-Yātrā* — the bathing festival of the deities of Jagannātha temple at Puri, which is held in the month of Jyeṣṭha (May-June) and is believed to have originated out of the ancient Śavara religious culture[63] — the image of Maṅgalā is entirely besmeared with sandalwood paste (*candana-veśa*) in such a way as to assume a fair complexion that contrasts very much with the normal colour of the image, made of black chlorite. Once the goddess is so dressed, the bathing festival of Lord Jagannātha takes place in the premises of Maṅgalā temple (which, as earlier mentioned, include a shrine for the worship of this deity). Later on in the year, during the *Durgā Pūjā*, the cult image of Maṅgalā is dressed in *siṁhavāhinī-veśa*, the mask of a lion being temporarily placed below it so to give it the appearance of a Durgā image.

Daśa-Mahāvidyā-pūjā is daily performed before the large Mahāvidyā images affixed to the inner walls of the *jagamohana* of Maṅgalā temple. Actually this worship pattern, followed by tradition at many other Śākta shrines of Orissa, does not seem to bear some markedly Tāntric characteristics. The Mahāvidyā sculptures set therein are of recent origin.

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[63] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

The most famous ceremony being observed at the Śākta *pīṭha* of Kakatpur is the already mentioned *Jhāmu Yātrā*, which marks the conclusion of the one-month Caitra festival. During the ceremony groups of non-brāhmaṇa dancing priests, termed as *ghaṇṭa-pāṭuās* after the gong (*ghaṇṭa*) they use to play to drive away evil forces, walk upon a pit or trench filled with burning charcoals outside Maṅgalā temple. They wear picturesque mythological dresses and carry a pitcher-shaped wooden container with a casket containing a small image of Maṅgalā adorned with red hibiscuses and other kinds of flower offerings. They also carry on their head the sacred pitcher filled with water representing the Devī in auspicious form, that is, Maṅgalā. One of these priests, wearing female garments and a mask of Kālī, performs a ritual dance called *Kālikā Nṛtya*, during which he is believed by the onlookers to be possessed by the Goddess. After the conclusion of the festival some Maṅgalā priests start journeying through the neighbouring areas carrying with them the proxy-image of the goddess (a clothed club). They promise the Hindu villagers immunity from attacks of smallpox and cholera in exchange for offerings and for their profession of faith in Maṅgalā.

Jhankad

The veneration paid to goddess Sāralā (an equivalent of the Sanskrit Śāradā), whose great sanctuary is located in the village of Jhankad near Jagatsinghpur in the area of the Mahanadi delta (Cuttack district), is one of the most spiritually elevated expressions of Śāktism in Orissa. This composite regional goddess is conceived as a synthesis of the divine figures of Durgā and Sarasvatī, whose respective mythological attributes are depicted in the cult image presiding over the *pīṭha* of Jhankad.

The Sanskrit word *śāradā*, from which the Oriyā divine epithet Sāralā derives, indicates a kind of *vīṇā* (the Indian lute) and, as a proper noun (Śāradā), is also one of the traditional names of Sarasvatī, the patroness of eloquence and learning, whose chief attribute is constituted by the stringed instrument in question. A *vīṇā* is also depicted in the cult image of Sāralā enshrined in the *pīṭha* of Jhankad along with a manuscript (*pustaka*), another of Sarasvatī's traditional attributes. At any rate, in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* the name Śāradā is attributed to the Śaiva-Śākta deity Durgā as well; the Śākta-Tāntric affiliation of the Hindu goddess Śāradā in the medieval period is, furthermore, evinced by the celebrated Tāntric work entitled *Śāradā-tilaka-tantra*, namely, 'the *Tantra* dealing with the sacred mark of Śāradā'.[64] In accordance with this tradition, the worshipped image of goddess Sāralā at Jhankad represents an iconographically irregular eight-armed Mahiṣamardinī Durgā holding in two of her hands the lute and the manuscript, a feature indicating the co-presence, in her divine person, of both Durgā's and Sarasvatī's nature.

The original site of the shrine of Sāralā at Jhankad does not coincide with the present

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64. M. Monier-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 1066.

one, occupied by a modern temple that contains in its sanctum a Devī image assignable to *ca.* the fifteenth century AD.[65] As stated in the local tradition, the original *pīṭha* of goddess Sāralā lay in the nearby village of Saralagrama, where the presence of a ruined temple and of a large tank, presently filled up with earth, testify to the past existence of an early medieval Hindu shrine. According to K.C. Panigrahi the archaeological remains in question date back, in all probability, to the Bhauma-kara epoch.[66] Starting from the Bhauma period till the end of the independent Hindu rule in Orissa in the sixteenth century AD, the cult of Sāralā is, thus, likely to have had its main centre in the village of Saralagrama in the neighbourhood of Jhankad, where, according to a local historical legend, the fifteenth-century Oriyā poet Sāralā Dāsa, a great devotee of goddess Sāralā, used to worship and meditate on the latter (who acted as his own patron deity) while sitting at the foot of a huge banyan still standing on the spot.

Sāralā Dāsa adopted the name of his beloved goddess as his own first name as a sign of devotion and surrender to her. This great śūdra poet used to state that he was initially an uncultured illiterate man and that the composition of his celebrated Oriyā version of the *Mahābhārata* had been inspired to him, verse after verse, by goddess Sāralā, of whom he considered himself the servant (*dāsa*).

> It is apparent from numerous biographical sketches given in his works that Sāralā Dāsa had no systematic education in his early age. What he achieved through self-education and untiring efforts has all been attributed to the grace of the goddess Sāralā, the deity of his devotion and inspiration, and he has nowhere taken any credit for what he wrote. Very often he has wanted us to believe that what he produced in his books, was dictated to him by Sāralā at night and he merely committed her dictates to writing in the day time. . . . Scattered throughout all his works his odes, invocations and prayers to different deities in general and to Sāralā in particular are so numerous that, when collected together, they will form a book of respectable size.[67]

Sāralā Dāsa also wrote the *Caṇḍī Purāṇa*, based on the story of Durgā killing Mahiṣāsura; he, furthermore, strove to identify his tutelary deity, Sāralā, with the great Goddess of the Śāktas by calling the former Sāralā Caṇḍī.

Ever since Sāralā Dāsa extolled her religious significance in his works, goddess Sāralā has been conceived by the Hindu devotees of Orissa as the manifestation of the supreme Caṇḍī that best suits the concept about Sarasvatī, the personification of the Power of Knowledge, who is believed to be a direct emanation of Brahmā. Goddess Sāralā is, accordingly, worshipped with Tāntric rites as the Śākta aspect of Sarasvatī, the patroness of learning, literature and arts. She is also known as Utkala Bhāratī, where Utkala stands for Orissā and Bhāratī (one of the epithets of Sarasvatī) stands for eloquence. In so far as she is conceived as the active eternal source of all wisdom, intelligence and inspiration, this female deity personifies *Brahma-vidyā* (the Mystic-Knowledge-of-the-Absolute), that is, the topmost religious concept in the perspective of *dakṣiṇācāra* Śāktism.

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[65] Orally from Dr. H.C. Das.

[66] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 451.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 291.

In the medieval period Śāradā cult was not confined to the Kaliṅga country only. Kashmir, for instance, has been long known as the home of goddess Śāradā. The sanctuary dedicated to this deity in that Himālayan province, already mentioned by Kalhaṇa in the twelfth century AD, was a very important pilgrimage centre of northern India and was associated with the historical figure of Śaṅkarācārya. Also the other important Śāradā shrine of medieval India, the one at Sringeri in central Karnataka, was associated with the activities of Śaṅkarācārya, who is stated to have founded a monastery there. Since Sringeri was an important centre of the Śākta-Tāntric school known as Śrīvidyā, the image of Śāradā venerated at that *pīṭha* is placed on a throne formed by a *śrīcakra-yantra*, the diagram representing the supreme form of ultimate reality according to the mystic-esoteric doctrines elaborated by the Śrīvidyā school.[68]

In South India, Sarasvatī/Śāradā was generally conceived as the *śakti* of Śiva rather than as that of Brahmā. Accordingly, she was often represented by the South Indian sculptors as wielding some of Śiva's weapons in addition to her traditional emblems, the *pustaka* and the *vīṇā*.[69] Of the latter two attributes, the former appears more related to the goddess' function as the *śakti* of Brahmā while the latter appears more related to her function as the *śakti* of Śiva (who, in his aspects as Vīṇādhara-Dakṣiṇāmūrti and Vīrabhadra, is usually shown as playing the stringed instrument at issue). The view according to which goddess Sarasvatī or Śāradā was a member of the Śaiva-Śākta cultic complex was evidently accepted at the *pīṭha* to her consecrated in Orissa. That is why such a pure, luminous and beneficent goddess as Śāradā could be accepted and venerated by the people as a manifestation of the Mahādevī, whose character is, in its traditional traits, much more ambivalent than Sarasvatī's one. Sārālā fundamentally embodies the creative and positive aspect of the *prakṛti-māyā-śakti* plexus of divine energies, and is, thus, identified with *vimarśa-śakti*, the Deliberating Power that conceives and programmes the evolution of the universe in accordance with the sacred principles contained in the Vedas. This makes this aspect of the great Goddess similar to Brahmā, the creator of the universe, whose special *śakti* is, in fact, Sarasvatī herself.[70]

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[68] G.S. Ghurye, *Gods and Men*, Bombay, 1962, pp. 246-7; J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. L'Induismo recente*, Milano, 1981, p. 75; P. Pal, 'The Fifty-One Śākta Pīṭhas', in I.S.Me.O., ed., *Orientalia. Iosephi Tucci memoriae dicata*, Serie Orientale vol. LVI (1988), p. 1048.

[69] B. Sahai, *Iconography of Some Important Minor Hindu and Buddhist Deities*, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 153-5.

It is not known what the original cult icon of Sāralā looked like; at any rate, the present representative image of the goddess — assignable, as above suggested, to *ca.* the fifteenth century AD — approximates to the iconography of goddess Śāradā as prescribed in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* (Ch. 69).[71] The image, according to the description of it given by local priests, represents an eight-armed Mahiṣamardinī Durgā holding respectively a sword, manuscript, lute, spear, disk, bell, bow, and pressing the head of the buffalo-demon with her hands. The goddess is mounted on lion as prescribed in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, which, nevertheless, describes her as having ten, and not eight arms. It is presumable that the original cult icon of Sāralā did not differ very much from the present one, for the Bhauma-kara rulers, who were, in all likelihood, the patronisers of the original Sāralā temple at Saralagrama, showed a predilection for the Mahiṣamardinī form of the Goddess, which the iconography of Sāralā to a great extent conforms to.

A local legend runs that Sāralā Devī was forced to flee from her original shrine at Saralagrama in AD 1568, when the supreme commander of the Muslim armies of Bengal, Kālāpahār, made a raid over Jhankad in order to destroy its far-famed Śakti temple. An important religious ceremony is still today observed in Jhankad thrice a year to remember that tragic event; on this occasion, the processional image of Sāralā is brought in a chariot from the modern Sāralā temple at Jhankad to the village of Saralagrama, where the image of the deity is ceremoniously installed on a throne to symbolise Sāralā's 'return' to the place where she had been worshipped for centuries until the Muslims armies desecrated her original shrine. Similarly, legends recording the profanation of Śākta shrines at the hand of the Muslim invaders led by Kālāpahār are handed down at Jajpur (two Mātṛkā temples), Konarak (Rāmacaṇḍī temple) and Kakatpur (Maṅgalā temple). It is interesting to observe that the Orissan goddesses having been reportedly assailed by the Muslims are stated, as a norm, to have taken shelter in water courses, water being, along with earth, the element that is more often associated with the Devī.

Another popular belief connects the name of goddess Sāralā to the term *śara* (an arrow), in that her worshipped image is stated to have been carved out of a stone slab with an arrow by Paraśurāma, the brāhmaṇa incarnation of Viṣṇu. The legend runs that Paraśurāma recovered the stone slab in question from under the ground after the desire expressed by the goddess, who had appeared before him while he was meditating in *yoga* under a banyan tree. Not far from the modern Sāralā temple at Jhankad, a rather naïve image in lime mortar representing Paraśurāma's face is actively worshipped along with a similarly executed image representing Sāralā's face under a sacred banyan tree; the latter is believed to be the very same tree under which the mythical encounter between goddess Sāralā and the hero Paraśurāma took place. The figure of Paraśurāma is also associated with other Śākta centres of Orissa situated along the course of the river Mahanadi, such as Carcikā temple at Banki and Sureśvarī temple at Sonepur. The brāhmaṇa *avatāra* of Viṣṇu did not enjoy a cultus of his own like the major *avatāras* of the god (Kṛṣṇa and Rāma), so that the Vaiṣṇava priests of the later medieval period created a series of legends about his coming to Orissa after exterminating the kṣatriyas, and thereafter associated such legends with some among the most eminent Śākta centres of Orissa.[72] Therefore, the story about the Sāralā-Paraśurāma *beṇṭhābāṛā* (meeting under the banyan tree) can be taken to be a mythological excrescence attributable to a later medieval Vaiṣṇava influence on the *pīṭha* of Jhankad.

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[70] H. Zimmer, *Miti e simboli dell'India*, Milano, 1993, p. 189.

[71] R.C. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

The decorative programme of the modern shrine of goddess Sāralā at Jhankad is dominated by female and erotic imagery. The side deities of the temple are Sūrya, a form of the Devī, and Kārttikeya, while two different images of Kālī are carved in the temple *sthānas* (the recesses between the *jagamohana* and the *deul*). The images of Daśa-Mahāvidyās are depicted on the upper portions of the pillars of the *maṇḍapa*, while a large Mahiṣamardinī image dominates the front porch of the temple (*fig.* 6).

The daily rituals performed at the shrine reflect the doctrinal principle, first expounded in the *Devī-Māhātmya*, according to which the great Goddess is the synthesis of the divine powers embodied respectively by Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī and Mahāsarasvatī. Accordingly, in the morning time Sāralā is conceived as a pure girl personifying Mahāsarasvatī, the non-manifest *śakti* of creation, and is dressed in white; at midday she is conceived as a married lady personifying Mahālakṣmī, the non-manifest *śakti* of preservation, and is dressed in red; in the evening time she is conceived as a decrepit old woman personifying Mahākālī, the non-manifest *śakti* of destruction, and is dressed in black. This kind of worship pattern is also followed at some other Śākta *pīṭhas* of Orissa.

Jhāmu Yātrā, the fire-walking festival, is yearly performed at Jhankad in the month of Caitra (March-April) with great pomp. Some Tāntric priests belonging to the Rāul caste (a śūdra or semi-tribal one) wear on that occasion a picturesque costume provided with a quantity of little jingling bells and dance barefoot over burning charcoals to the rhythm of drums in order to show the onlookers the 'yogic' power being conferred on them by goddess Sāralā. This dance, based on the performance of *mudrās* and other ritual gestures, is subsequently made go round the villages of the district for one month in order to gain new devotees to the goddess. It appears highly probable that this Tāntric festival has a tribal origin.

Animal sacrifices were suppressed at the *pīṭha* of Jhankad in around the year 1945 at the priests' request. Various Tāntric rites are still today performed at Sāralā temple on the occasion of *Durgā-Pūjā*, but yet the sacrifice of the buffalo, as well as that of goats, are no more in vogue there.

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[72] Orally from Dr. H.C. Das.

Banki

The *pīṭha* of goddess Carcikā at Banki (Cuttack district), lying on a flat hillock that rises on the right bank of the river Mahanadi, is no doubt the most celebrated and far-famed Śakti temple of Orissa among those being presided over by an image of Cāmuṇḍā. Although the present temple of Carcikā Devī is a modern construction, the sanctity of the *pīṭha* dates back to a very remote epoch (possibly from the Bhauma-kara period). A holy rock cropping out of the pavement of the temple courtyard is traditionally venerated by the people as Carcikā's 'birthplace', with this cultic feature suggesting that the goddess may have been initially worshipped in aniconic form. The Cāmuṇḍā image enshrined within the temple sanctum dates from *ca.* the ninth-tenth centuries AD.[73]

The shrine of Carcikā rose to regional eminence after the Muslim conquest of Orissa in the sixteenth century AD, when a local line of feudatories, who acknowledged the overlordship of the semi-independent Bhoi *mahārājās* of Khurda, established its rule over the area and made Banki a centre of some importance in the middle tract of the Mahanadi Valley. Under the British rule the principality of Banki was given the status of a Tributary State, which fact increased the popularity of its tutelary goddess, Carcikā.

Rudra Carcikā — a name suggesting the close link of this deity with Rudra or Śiva — is the first among the eight different varieties of Cāmuṇḍā enumerated in the *Agni Purāṇa* (50.30-37). She is there described as six-armed, holding respectively a skull, knife, spear and noose in four of them, and keeping the hide of an elephant stretched over her head with the remaining two.[74] Such iconographic prescriptions, however, were apparently not followed in carving the worshipped image of goddess Carcikā at Banki, which, according to the description of it furnished by local priests, represents an eight-armed Cāmuṇḍā seated in *ardhaparyaṅka* on a recumbent male body having his hands folded in *añjali-mudrā*; the goddess is garlanded with skulls and has *kartṛ*, *triśūla*, *nāga-pāśa*, *akṣamālā*, *chinnamastaka*, *ḍamaru*, and *kapāla* as her weapons or attributes while her major left hand is placed near the chin as if she was engaged in chewing the little finger to express her extreme wrath.

The *Vāmana Purāṇa* (Ch. 73) states that Carcikā was born, along with eight Bhairavas, from the blood and sweat drops having exuded from Śiva's forehead in the course of the god's fight against the mighty *asura* Andhaka — a motif clearly modelled on the mythical account of the birth of Kālī/Cāmuṇḍā from the brows of the great Goddess as found in the *Devī-Māhātmya*. Carcikā — unlike Cāmuṇḍā, described as a handsome and youthful goddess —

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[73] Orally from Dr. H.C. Das.

[74] B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-3.

thereafter roamed over the whole earth until she established herself on the Hingula mountain in Baluchistan. There is a very primitive cave shrine at Hinglaja in Baluchistan at which goddess Durgā, represented by an uncarved piece of stone, was once worshipped as Koṭṭarī, a name reminding of the ancient Tamilian nude goddess known as Koṭṭavī. This shrine, presently situated in Pakistan, is recognised by tradition as one of the fifty-one or fifty-two Śākta *pīṭhas*. The goddess enshrined therein was in course of time identified with Hiṅgulā Devī — a fire-*śakti* of mountainous regions who occupies a seat of eminence also in the Śākta pantheon of Orissa — and finally with Carcikā Devī mentioned in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*. The association of Carcikā with the non-Āryan goddess worshipped on mount Hingula in Baluchistan seems to have been established during the Gupta period, beginning from which a goddess called Carcikā is mentioned in inscriptions. Later on during the medieval period the Paramāra kings of Mālvā (ninth-twelfth centuries AD) made goddess Carcikā their family deity.[75] The presence on the Orissan territory of two important Śākta *pīṭhas*, the one consecrated to Carcikā, the other to Hiṅgulā, may be indicative of the existence, in the medieval period, of religious links connecting the Śākta milieu of Orissa with a number of regional Śākta cults having developed in areas of North India which lay very far from Orissa.

It has been pointed out in chapter 2 that the Sanskrit name Carcikā, which can be rendered with the expression 'repetition of a word' (while uttering *japa*), was probably used in the Tāntric context to lay stress upon the role of the great Goddess in general, and of Cāmuṇḍā in particular, as Mātṛkā Śakti or Parā Vāc (Supreme Logos), the non-manifest form of ultimate reality that becomes manifested as a divine power as soon as a devotee utters a *mantra*. As earlier indicated, the *Kavaca*, a later appendage to the *Devī-Māhātmya*, states that goddess Carcikā is the protectress of a worshipper's upper lip, with this most likely indicating her function as the divinity presiding over the Tāntric devotional practice known as *japa*, based on the repetition, over and over again, of magic formulae and sacred invocations. Thus, the form of the Mahādevī known as Carcikā appears connected with the figure of the Vedic goddess Vāc, the personification of the Revealed Word or *Brahman*-sound, as well as with the magico-mystic doctrine of the Knowledge-of-the-Eternal-Sound (*sphoṭa-vidyā*), which was anciently popularised by the philosophers of the Mīmāṁsā-*darśana* and by the udgātra brāhmaṇas, the singers of the Vedic hymns called *sāmans*. It seems that, at a very early stage of Orissan history, communities of udgātra brāhmaṇas settled along the lower course of the river Mahanadi, and precisely in the area anciently known as Airāvata *maṇḍala*, to which the territory of Banki roughly belongs.[76] These Śākta-oriented communities of hymn-singer brāhmaṇas — which are now mainly attached to the shrine of goddess Bhaṭṭārikā at

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[75] V.S. Agrawala, *Vāmana Purāṇa — A Study*, Varanasi, 1964, pp. 136-40.

[76] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *Śilpa Prakāśa: Medieval Orissan Sanskrit Text on Temple Architecture by Rāmacandra Kaulācāra*, Leiden, 1966, pp. XVII and XX; N.K. Sahu, 'Orissa from the Earliest Times to the Present Day', in Id., ed., *A History of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1956, p. 354.

Baramba, situated not far from Banki on the opposite bank of the Mahanadi — might well have been the original promoters of the worship of goddess Carcikā, apparently connected, as above stated, with some mystic speculations on the magical power of sound.

The cult of Carcikā — or Carcikei, as the Oriyā villagers call her — was also very diffused in the Prachi Valley area, a centre of esoteric Tāntric practices since at least the Bhaumakara epoch. Many village goddesses, in general all those represented by an old image of Cāmuṇḍā, are still today worshipped in that part of Orissa under the name Carcikei.

The modern temple of Carcikā at Banki, like any genuinely Śākta shrine, has three Devī-images as its *pārśva-devatās*. These respectively represent a four-armed Cāmuṇḍā worshipped as Uttara Caṇḍī (northern side), a four-armed Mahiṣamardinī Durgā worshipped as Paścima Caṇḍī (western side), and an eight-armed Cāmuṇḍā worshipped as Dakṣiṇa Caṇḍī (southern side); the last one is a smaller copy of the old image enshrined within the temple sanctum.

The miniature images of Daśa-Mahāvidyās are carved out of wood in a row above the *jagamohana* portal. They are painted in bright colours and constitute a little masterpiece of modern local handicraft. Two large Durgā images, one mounted on lion, the other on tiger, flank the temple doorframe on either side. In the temple premises, a series of small shrines dedicated to various deities from the Śākta, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava pantheons testify to the religious catholicity of this renowned seat of goddess-worship.

Among the festivals observed at the *pīṭha* of Banki, the most important ones are *Jhāmu Yātrā* (the fire-walking ceremony) and *Durgā-Pūjā*. As regards the latter festival, Carcikā temple is one of the few eminent Śākta centres of Orissa at which the traditional sacrifice of a buffalo is still nowadays performed on the *Mahāṣṭamī* night. On that occasion the cult icon of Carcikā is dressed in Bhairavī-*veśa* while a large crowd of devotees gather in the temple premises to enjoy the *darśana* (sight) of the goddess and to attend the buffalo-sacrifice, which takes place after midnight. The sacrificial buffalo, a young male one, is called *mahāpaśu* (the great animal) and is considered sacred by the people. The devotees touch, salute and pray the animal while it is yoked to a tree near the temple awaiting its own end. The man who beheads the buffalo is known as *kaṭāla* (the cutter). His service in the temple is hereditary. He uses to besmear for the occasion his entire body with sandalwood paste and his forehead with vermilion paste, and observes fast on the day of sacrifice. He decapitates the buffalo with his sword as soon as the chief priest of the shrine, after having performed the prescribed *pūjā* rituals, puts some sandalwood paste on the weapon and sprinkles it with holy water. Prior to the sacrifice, the *kaṭāla* performs a ritual dance accompanied by typical music, possibly under the effect of some drug. After the buffalo is killed, ladies use to put a little of its blood on their feet, children on their hands, and the youth on their heads. The head of the animal is offered to goddess Carcikā along with a portion of the blood of about two hundred goats, which are yearly sacrificed *en masse* in the vicinity of the temple. The celebration of the most sacred day of *Durgā-Pūjā* in such a bloody manner is locally stated to have been introduced by the feudal rulers of Banki around the end of the medieval period, yet some others believe that the whole thing was given a start from at least the Imperial Gaṅga period.[77]

Gopalprasad, Talcher

Goddess Hiṅgulā is the *grāma-devatā* of Gopalprasad, a village having strategic economic importance located in the heart of the coal-mine area of Dhenkanal district. In times past, she also acted as the *iṣṭa-devatā* of the *rājā*s of the neighbouring city of Talcher, whose semi-tribal feudal principality, starting from the sixteenth century AD, owed allegiance to the Bhoi *mahārājā*s of Khurda and later on, under the British rule, became one of the Orissa Tributary States.

Hiṅgulā is worshipped at Gopalprasad in the shape of an idol all through the year, but she attracts a huge crowd of pilgrims — ten to fifteen thousand every year — particularly on the occasion of her *yātrā*, which is held on the day previous to the full moon day in the month of Caitra (March-April), more or less coinciding with the *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* day and the relative fire-walking festival celebrated at many Śākta and Śaiva shrines of Orissa. What most charms pilgrims on that occasion is the fact that the goddess manifests herself in the form of jets of natural gas issuing from the coal fields, which either ignite themselves on contact with the air or are ignited by the priests. The goddess is believed to suggest in dream to her chief priest, known as *sevait*, the exact spot of her annual manifestation some days before the beginning of the *yātrā*. The *sevait* then proceeds to the spot indicated to him by the goddess, where, in most cases, he will find a natural fire caused by the self-ignition of coal; he keeps the flame burning by feeding it with coal until the appointed time for worship comes. Starting from that time, thousands of pilgrims go to the spot for seven days and make their offerings to the igneous goddess. The site of worship of Hiṅgulā extends over the area of the coal fields of Gopalprasad for several kilometres, the actual spot of her manifestation varying every year.[78]

There is, moreover, a popular belief among the people of Gopalprasad, that on the day of *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* Hiṅgulā strides along the village streets like an invisible breeze; the propitiation of the goddess by means of offerings presented her directly on the street is said to bring about the destruction of all evil forces.[79] This belief may be related to the physical qualities of natural gas, and particularly to the smell of sulphur associated with Hiṅgulā. By the way, the name itself of this goddess is connected from the etymological point of view with two Sanskrit terms indicating natural substances that contain some sulphurous composites, i.e., *hiṅgula* (cinnabar, employed in the preparation of vermilion) and *hiṅgu* (asafoetida, a vegetable resin used as a medicine or for seasoning).[80] Sulphur, according to the ancient principles of Tāntric alchemy, symbolises Śakti and woman's blood, while mercury symbolises Śiva and man's seed. The alchemical union of mercury and sulphur, the primordial pair of opposites, is considered the most powerful panacea. It is stated in some texts that this difficult alchemical process, to be technically successful, should be accompanied by the performance of erotic rites.[81] The name Hiṅgulā, designating the Orissan fire-goddess under discussion as well as other 'sulphurous' *śaktis* worshipped in different parts of the Indian sub-continent, may bear some reference to this alchemical ritual complex.

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[77] *Vijaya*, Madras and Bhubaneswar, November 1995, pp. 24-6 (in Oriyā).

[78] N. Senapati and P.N. Tripathy, eds., *Dhenkanal District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1972, p. 430.

[79] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Summing up, Hiṅgulā is a fire-*śakti* residing in the subsoil, from which she periodically springs forth in the form of jets of flaming gas. She is regarded by the people as the *śakti* of Agni, the Vedic god of fire, and also as the destructive power issuing from the third eye of Śiva. Her Śākta-Tāntric nature is suggested by her being propitiated in the *mantra* of Durgā, and is also indicated by her very name (which associates her with the red colour — the colour of blood — and with the element sulphur — the Tāntric-alchemical symbol of the great Goddess). She is furthermore believed to protect the people from the outbreaks of fire and is, accordingly, specially propitiated in the summer season, during which fire usually breaks out in the villages because of dry weather.

The idea that fire itself is a manifestation of the Goddess can be traced back to the tribal adoration of fire in cold mountainous regions. No Vedic authority supports the religious principle according to which fire is a goddess. In some later Vedic texts, such as the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, the seven tongues of flame of Agni are mentioned with feminine names, yet they are not conceived there as divinities by full right. Fire becomes identified with the Goddess in the *Devī Purāṇa*, a work generally assigned to the closing part of the Gupta age, which attempts to reintroduce the Vedic sacrifices — always performed with the use of three sacred fires — in the form of Tāntric rituals.[82] Starting from the late Gupta period fire-pits, which formed the centre of the ancient Vedic *yajña*, came, thus, to be regarded as the seats of the Devī, as is demonstrated, to remain in Orissa's context, by the already discussed legend — possibly dating from the Gupta period — relating to the origin of goddess Virajā of Jajpur from the *gārhapatya-agni* in the course of the great Vedic *yajña* celebrated at Daśāśvamedha *ghāṭ* by the god Brahmā in person. During the medieval period, following this new religious trend, natural volcanic or gas eruptions, long since venerated by the primitive tribes of the Indian sub-continent, were likewise given a primary importance as the seats of the Devī. A process of Sanskritisation was then carried out through the establishment of Śākta *pīṭha*s at the places where such natural phenomena occurred more frequently, such as at Hoshiarpur in the Punjab (the seat of goddess Jvālāmukhī, whose name means 'Fire-Mouth', namely, a volcano) and at Hinglaja in Baluchistan (the seat of the goddess alternatively known as Koṭṭarī, Carcikā, or Hiṅgulā, whose ancient cult has been discussed in the preceding section).[83]

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[80] M. Monier-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 1298.

[81] E. Zolla, *Aure. I luoghi e i riti*, Venezia, 1995, pp. 78-83.

[82] B. Bhattacharya, *Śaivism and the Phallic World,* New Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta, 1975, I, pp. 265-6; W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

It appears highly probable that the creation of a Hiṅgulā *pīṭha* in Orissa was motivated by the same reasons that were at the basis of the acknowledgement of the sanctity of the volcanic or gas eruptions which periodically took place at Hoshiarpur and Hinglaja in the north-western part of the Indian sub-continent. One may even hypothesise some early contacts among the Śākta devotees of all these fire-goddesses. It cannot be a mere coincidence that also the fire-goddess worshipped at Hinglaja in Baluchistan is called Hiṅgulā. Like the latter, Hiṅgulā of Gopalprasad was originally an autochthonous goddess who, in course of time, attracted the Hindus on account of her 'magical' way of manifesting herself in the form of self-ignited flames.

As mentioned in chapter 2, a local legend states that a human sacrifice was performed by the founder of the city of Talcher, king Padmanābha Haricandana, in order to win the favour of Hiṅgulā and defeat the Nalas, the then asserted rulers of the region. This reference to human sacrifices to Hiṅgulā can be taken to be a further witness of the tribal origin of this goddess. The association of Hiṅgulā with a *kālasi* (shaman), who, on the occasion of her *yātrā*, becomes ritually possessed by her and communicates in trance the goddess' wishes and decrees to her devotees, also testifies to the tribal origin of this Śākta cult. Moreover, fowls are still nowadays sacrificed to Hiṅgulā by her semi-tribal worshippers in a very cruel fashion, that is, by throwing them alive into the sacred fire-pit identified with the goddess herself. This sacrificial custom bears some resemblance to the sacrifice performed by the Mundas on the eve of their ritual spring hunt, during which a fowl is offered to the tribal goddess of wild animals, Birchandi, by burning it alive at the base of a sacred sapling of *simul* (the cotton-producing tree, *Bombax malabaricum*) which is immediately put to fire, fowl and all, to represent forest-firing and the ritual hunt connected with it.[84]

According to R.P. Mohapatra

> the Hiṅgulā of Gopalprasad is supposed to be the non-vegetarian sister of the Puri Hiṅgulā who is Lakṣmī. The possession of the *kālasi* during Hiṅgulā Yātrā and the

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[83] B. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, I, p. 266.

[84] R. Rahmann, 'The Ritual Spring Hunt of Northeastern and Middle India', *Anthropos*, vol. XLVII (1952), pp. 874 and 880.

> beginning of the sacrifices take place between sun set and the rise of the moon because at this hour the Puri temple of Hiṅgulā is supposed to be closed, and so the Hiṅgulā from Puri can come to Gopalprasad'.[85]

By virtue of this device goddess Lakṣmī is associated with the sacrificial activity typical of popular Śāktism without losing the pureness of a Vaiṣṇavī Śakti. This allows us to conclude that, in the Vaiṣṇava perspective, the concept underlying the propitiation of Hiṅgulā is very similar to that underlying the propitiation of Alakṣmī (Ill-Fortune), Lakṣmī's maleficent and impure sister born, as stated in the Purāṇas, from the second churning of the Ocean.

Banpur

The shrine of goddess Bhagavatī located in the city of Banpur (Chilika Lake area) is the most eminent and sacred Śākta *pīṭha* of southern Orissa. This regional goddess is greatly revered throughout the Banpur tract of the Māls, the wild hilly country lying in between Chilika Lake and Nayagarh. The area is mostly inhabited by semi-tribal communities having originated out of the Kondh and Saora stocks.

The origin of the worship of goddess Bhagavatī at Banpur cannot be clearly traced due to the lack of archaeological evidence. It, however, appears quite probable that the shrine dedicated to this deity was established, or better Hinduised, by the Śailodbhava kings of Koṅgoda, who reigned from about the mid-sixth century to the mid-eighth century AD. The capital city of this early medieval royal dynasty of South Orissa rose on the site presently occupied by the village of Bankada, lying at a short distance from Banpur. As already indicated in chapter 2, the goddess enshrined in the *pīṭha* under discussion was worshipped for ages in aniconic form (as a piece of stone or a rough stone idol) before the priests officiating to her cultus decided to get her image carved in iconic form in order to attract a larger number of Hindu pilgrims there. The present worshipped image of Bhagavatī, representing a disproportionate and iconographically irregular eight-armed goddess in a standing pose, is clearly a creation of the modern period, possibly dating from the present century only.

The probable original aniconic form of the cult image of goddess Bhagavatī, as well as the practice of human sacrifice in her honour (which, as suggested in chapter 2, was most likely a ritual standard at this shrine in times past), are both indicative of the autochthonous origin of this deity. The south-western provinces of Orissa are still today the stronghold of aniconic goddess-cults having a tribal origin such as those dedicated to Khambheśvarī at Aska, Tārā-Tāriṇī on the Rishikulya river, Vyāghra Devī at Kuladha, Kondhuṇī Devī at Suruda, Kālijāī on a rocky island of Chilika Lake, Būḍhī Ṭhākurāṇī at Berhampur and many others. Some among these goddesses were no doubt propitiated in by-gone days through the offering of human victims under the influence of the Kondh sacrificial rite known as

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[85] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

Meriah. Furthermore, the districts of Ganjam and Phulbani, separated by the forest-clad hilly region called the Māls, were the cradle of the cult of Bhairavī, the most fearful metaphysical aspect under which the Mahādevī of the Hindus was ever conceived.

All these circumstances lead one to conclude that Bhagavatī of Banpur was originally a tribal goddess having probably a malignant and blood-thirsty character; her cult was Āryanised by the Śailodbhavas of Koṅgoda in the seventh-eighth centuries AD with maintaining some of its primitive traits, such as aniconism in the cult image of the goddess and the practice of human sacrifice (for the performance of which a family clan from Banpur, the Balijenā one, was appointed by the kings in offering regularly, once every year, one of its members as the designate victim in exchange for land grants).[86]

The Sanskrit name Bhagavatī is a generic epithet for the great Goddess that was specially employed in the Kaliṅga country to designate the ten-armed variety of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā.[87] This name has neither a Śaiva nor a Vaiṣṇava connotation, but rather indicates the *śakti* (active power of cosmic transformation) of Īśvara, the supreme hypostasis of the Brahmaṇical Trimūrti.[88] Therefore, the designation of the great Goddess as Bhagavatī is meant to comprehend both the Śaiva and the Vaiṣṇava aspect of the supreme female principle. This was a very important theological element in such a region as ancient Koṅgoda, where, in the post-Gupta period (during which the shrine of Bhagavatī was, as supposed, Āryanised), Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism were vying with each other for religious supremacy. The female principle was venerated as Bhagavatī also in some medieval Hindu countries lying very far from Orissa, such as, for instance, in Kerala and in Indo-China.

The temple of Bhagavatī at Banpur is a modern construction on whose outer walls the modern images of the Ten Mahāvidyās are depicted along with a number of erotic figures. Such a kind of imagery is meant to lay stress upon the Śākta-Tāntric nature of the shrine itself. The side deities of the temple, represented by the nicely carved images of Gaṇeśa, Mahiṣamardinī and Bhuvaneśvarī, date possibly from the later Somavaṁśī period or from the Gaṅga period. Two other medieval Śākta images affixed to the temple walls represent Cāmuṇḍā and Pārvatī respectively. A subsidiary shrine facing the temple east contains two later large images representing Cāmuṇḍā and Mahiṣamardinī, which are worshipped as one under the name of Polkāsuṇī (a local goddess).

The most important festivals celebrated in honour of goddess Bhagavatī are *Durgā-Pūjā*, *Beṇṭhāmāvasyā*, and *Pañcaḍola Yātrā*.

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[86] *Vijaya*, Madras and Bhubaneswar, November 1995, p. 31 (in Oriyā).

[87] B.K. Rath, 'Sculptural Art of Orissa', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, Cuttack, 1993, p. 113.

[88] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

On the occasion of the night of *Mahāṣṭamī* during the *Durgā-Pūjā*, a buffalo and hundreds of goats are sacrificed to the goddess by ritual decapitation. Bhagavatī temple at Banpur is one of the few important Śākta sanctuaries of Orissa at which the traditional buffalo-sacrifice is still being performed, the other ones being, as earlier indicated, Virajā temple at Jajpur and Carcikā temple at Banki. An unique feature of the mass animal sacrifice which is yearly performed at Banpur is that a portion of the blood of the slaughtered animals is mixed with rice pellets and becomes so turned into *mahāprasāda* (holy food); these pellets are then flung to the sky by a priest during a Tāntric rite, and the local people firmly state that they never fall back to the ground as if they were magically 'absorbed' by the air!

On the last day of the dark fortnight preceding *Durgā-Pūjā*, the festival called *Beṇṭhāmāvasyā* (the new moon of the meeting) is celebrated. This festival draws its name from the ritual encounter of the proxy-image of goddess Bhagavatī with that of the local goddess Virajā (one of the four female guardian deities of the *pīṭha* installed in correspondence with the four cardinal points), which is staged by the temple priests on that occasion. Such processional images consist of tall and profusely clothed posts suggesting the appearance of a female deity. This kind of representative image of the Goddess appears to bear some connection with the concept about Stambheśvarī or Khambheśvarī, the Goddess of the Post, who was historically, and still now is, greatly revered in south-western Orissa. After being separately carried in procession along the city streets, the two sister goddesses meet, embrace each other and dance together in a spectacular and colourful pantomime that is accompanied by the sound of drums and is followed by a large crowd of devotees. The pole-shaped processional image of Bhagavatī is normally housed in the *jagamohana* of Dakṣa Prajāpati temple, a Śaiva shrine dating from the twelfth century AD.[89] The latter temple, the presiding deity of which is represented by a *śakti* without *liṅga*, is closely connected from the ritualistic viewpoint with the *pīṭha* of Bhagavatī.

Lastly, on the occasion of *Pañcaḍola Yātrā* (the festival of five swings), which usually falls during the month of March and coincides with the well-known swinging festival of the deities celebrated all over India in spring, the proxy-images of the most important divinities worshipped in the Banpur area (more than seventy) are carried in procession on palanquins from their respective sites of worship to meet the processional image of Bhagavatī, who is regarded in this case as the *Ṭhākurāṇī* (Our-Lady) of the district. A grandiose parade, celebrated with profusion of colourful ceremonial dresses and flower garlands and accompanied by dance, music and exercises of martial arts, takes place on that day on a large field in which a multitude of people throng. This is no doubt the most famous festival observed in Banpur in honour of goddess Bhagavatī, the presiding deity of the place.

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[89] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, II, Leiden, 1986, p. 636.

Ekāmra or Bhubaneswar

Bhubaneswar, the earliest known Śaiva-Śākta centre of the historical period, the present capital of Orissa, has been a great centre of religious activities from very ancient times. Archaeologically the origin of the site popularly known as the temple town of Bhubaneswar is traceable from the sixth century AD, when the Śailodbhava kings of Koṅgoda were ruling over the southern tracts of Orissa, namely, the present districts of Ganjam, Puri and part of that of Cuttack. The further antiquity of the city is generally ascertained in literature on the basis of Purāṇic accounts and local legends. In consideration of Śaivism, Bhubaneswar rose to eminence in the Indian context from about the sixth-seventh centuries AD, when Banaras, the earliest Śaivite centre of India, lost its sanctity and vigour. The ancient city of Banaras faced at that time a sort of disintegration in religious activities, which determined the rise of new Śaiva *kṣetras* in other places of the country. The effect of what happened at Banaras was echoed at Bhubaneswar. Hint of such events is found in the *Ekāmra Purāṇa*, an Orissan work recorded in about the eleveenth-twelfth centuries AD. The allegorical story of Raktavāhu attacking Bhubaneswar, contained in that work, can be correlated with the invasion of Śaśāṅka of Bengal during the period of reign of the Śailodbhavas (as already discussed in chapter 2). King Śaśāṅka is credited in the tradition with the construction of the early temple of Liṅgarāja in the name of Tribhuvaneśvara, which competed in sanctity with the Viśvanātha temple of Banaras. The *kṣetra* of Ekāmra (One-Mango-Tree), which included within its sacred boundaries this newly-built Śaiva shrine, is stated in the *Ekāmra Purāṇa* to have been selected by Śiva as his secluded and delightful seat in the mythical *tretā-yuga*, when the god decided to retire from Banaras (the sanctity of which appeared then corrupted by sin and overcrowding).[90]

Whatever may be the fact, Śaivism-Śāktism became the dominant religion at Ekāmra *kṣetra* from the sixth century AD, if not earlier, as appears evident from the imagery carved on the external walls of the extant temple groups of Lakṣmaṇeśvara-Bharateśvara-Śatrughneśvara and of Paraśurāmeśvara-Svarṇajāleśvara, the earliest known Śaivite monuments of the place. The manifestation of Śiva that was initially venerated at the *kṣetra*, Tribhuvaneśvara (the Lord-of-the-Three-Worlds), is likely to have been already associated by that time with a consort goddess named Gopāliṇī or Kīrttimatī (the latter name being recorded in the list of Śākta *pīṭhas* appended to the *Matsya Purāṇa*[91]).

A Purāṇic myth of Orissa accounting for the origin of the shrine of Liṅgarāja (anciently dedicated to Śiva Tribhuvaneśvara) lays much emphasis on the Śiva-Śakti union. The section of this myth dealing with the origin of the name Kīrttivāseśvara (attributed to the huge

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[90] Orally from Dr. H.C. Das; K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-6; R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[91] V.S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa — A Study*, p. 105.

svayambhū-liṅga of Ekāmra *kṣetra* before it was renamed as Liṅgarāja) and to that of the large Devīpādaharā tank, lying near it, is centred upon the idea of the mutual and somehow loving assistance lent by Śiva to Pārvatī and vice versa when the two had to face the local *asuras*. The story runs that the two demon brothers Kīrtti and Vāsa, who had gained from the gods the boon of being never killed by any male being nor by any weapon, were killed by Pārvatī in the guise of Gopālinī (the Cowherdess), who, being a female, was not prevented to do that. The two *asuras*, charmed by the beauty of the goddess, whom they had met with in Ekāmra forest, wanted to possess her, but she, so instructed by Śiva, asked them to carry her on their shoulders, pretending to have made the vow that the one who would raise her from the ground shall obtain her as his wife. When the two demon brothers attempted to lift the divine cowherdess, the latter pressed them down again and again with her feet (which, being not a weapon, were excluded from the promise of immunity made by the gods to the two *asuras*) until they died and were sunk down into the subterranean world. Water suddenly gushed forth from the ground and formed the large pool that, after having been embanked with flights of steps, came to be known as Devīpādaharā tank (from *Devī-pāda*, i.e., the goddess' foot). The self-generated *liṅga* worshipped at Ekāmra *kṣetra* likewise assumed the name Kīrttivāseśvara to commemorate Pārvatī's victory over Kīrtti and Vāsa.[92] Pārvatī was since then on worshipped at the *kṣetra* as Devī Gopālinī, Kīrttimatī or Kīrttivāsamardinī, the tutelary deity of Bhubaneswar.

Apart from the fact, that the name Kīrttivāseśvara could be also related to the epithet Kṛttivāsa (He-Who-has-an-Animal-Hide-as-His-Garment) given to Rudra in the Vedas,[93] and leaving out of consideration the evident relation of this story with the well-known Purāṇic motif of Durgā's luring the *asuras* with her beauty in order to kill them more easily, the myth of Gopālinī is important in that it lays stress upon the co-operation of Śiva and his divine spouse in fighting the *asuras* with depicting the two as a fairly united team. The continuation of this story describes, in fact, the thirst of the exhausted Goddess after her struggle with Kīrtti and Vāsa and the consequent shooting of an arrow by Śiva which pierced the ground and made water gush forth from it so that Pārvatī's thirst could be quenched.[94] This section of the legend, aiming at explaining the origin of the vast Bindusāgara tank at Bhubaneswar, depicts Śiva as a sympathetic-minded husband who is very much worried about his wife's health. The later Bhavānī-Śaṅkara temple at Bhubaneswar, built in the Gaṅga period on the bank of the Bindusāgara tank,[95] bears witness of this old myth in its very sanctum, where the object of cult is represented by a *liṅga* placed beside a recumbent image of Pārvatī, who is fancied to have a rest after her fight with the two demon brothers Kīrtti and Vāsa while Śiva is gently massaging her worn-out limbs. This unusual pair of cult icons — for usually, in Hindu art, it is Pārvatī (or Lakṣmī) who massages her consort, and not vice versa — testifies to the great popularity at Bhubaneswar of the motif of the loving marital tenderness that, in Orissa's mythological context, came to characterise Śiva and Pārvatī's relationship from the Somavaṁśī epoch onwards. The Umāmaheśvara (Śiva-*cum*-Pārvatī) images from Orissa, in which the tenderness and the erotic attitude displayed by Śiva and his consort Pārvatī while embracing each other were constantly accentuated century after century, provide another glaring example of this (*Pl.* XVIII and *figs*. 42 and 43).

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[92] K.C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, Calcutta, 1961, pp. 221-3; R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

[93] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 487.

[94] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-4.

[95] K.C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa*, p. 430.

At a certain stage of the medieval history of Bhubaneswar goddess Gopālinī, the protectress of that all-India-famed pilgrimage centre, was assimilated in the cult to the Śākta-Tāntric goddess Bhuvaneśvarī. A new shrine dedicated to this deity was erected in the compound of the great Liṅgarāja temple, which in the eleventh century AD had replaced the more ancient sanctuary consecrated to Śiva Tribhuvaneśvara or Kīrttivāśesvara. A sculptural panel depicting the episode of the annihilation of the two *asuras* Kīrtti and Vāsa by Gopālinī, facing Bhuvaneśvarī temple, testifies to the importance gained by the Gopālinī myth in the Liṅgarāja cult pattern.[96] The image presently enshrined in the temple conforms to the canonical iconography of goddess Bhuvaneśvarī, but is later than the temple it presides over. It cannot, thus, be known for a certainty what the original cult icon of Gopālinī/Bhuvaneśvarī looked like.[97] The later developmental phases of Śakti cult in the Liṅgarāja temple complex are dealt with in the section of chapter 4 dedicated to goddess Pārvatī.

Gopālinī, otherwise known as Bhuvaneśvarī, is thus the earliest known *Pīṭha-Devī* of Ekāmra *kṣetra*. In course of time, to highlight the significance of the Śiva-Śakti union, several Śākta shrines were established here along with the Śaiva ones. Leaving aside the iconographic depiction, in the Śailodbhava period, of Śākta images like those of Pārvatī, Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, Saptamātṛkās, etc. (e.g., in the temple of Paraśurāmeśvara, *ca.* AD 750), during the subsequent Bhauma period independent Śākta shrines were founded in the city of Bhubaneswar, such as those of Vaitāl Deul, Uttarāyaṇī, Mohinī, Akṣaracaṇḍī (all lying round the Bindusāgara tank), Dakṣiṇa Caṇḍī (close to the market area), etc. The Somavaṁśī period is marked for converting Ekāmra *kṣetra* to a great centre of Śaivism with the construction of a series of temples and also of some Śākta shrines such as those dedicated to Gaurī, Bhuvaneśvarī and Sāvitrī, (*Pl.* XXIII) built by employing the *khākharā* order (peculiar to the Śākta temples only).

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[96] H.C. Das, Iconography of Śākta Divinities, unpublished manuscript.

[97] D. Mitra, 'Four Little-Known Khākharā Temples of Orissa', *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, vol. II (1960), p. 16 and ns. 1 and 2.

It has been indicated in chapter 2 that the left-hand Tāntric elements in the worship pattern of the Śākta goddesses were introduced at Bhubaneswar during the Bhauma period, particularly in referring to the temple of Vaitāl. Unfortunately, we do not have the traces of such a worship pattern in the rites presently performed for the propitiation of Gopāliṇī/ Bhuvaneśvarī in the Liṅgarāja temple compound. However, since this deity was not merely a form of the mild consort of Śiva, Pārvatī, but was rather conceived as a demon-slayer like Durgā or Cāmuṇḍā, it appears plausible that Śākta-Tāntric rituals similar to the ones performed at Bhubaneswar by the *vāmācāra* Śāktas of the Bhauma epoch may have been adopted, in the same historical period, also at the *pīṭha* of Gopāliṇī, the tutelary deity of the town. This supposedly original mode of worship of Gopāliṇī is likely to have been modified by the Somavaṁśīs and later on by the Gaṅgas to a Vaiṣṇavite form, such as it is to be found now.

The eight prominent Śākta *pīṭha*s of Orissa discussed in this chapter relate their ancient origin, continuance through the vicissitudes of time till the present day, maintenance and, in certain cases, proliferation of their ritualistic worship pattern in a more systematic manner. People of all walks of life throng at these *pīṭha*s mostly with an intention of fulfilling their hearts' desire through the grace and benediction of the Goddess. As already mentioned, Śakti cult in Orissa, after having flourished in the early medieval period as an esoteric cult, was purged of its esoteric practices by the Gaṅga emperors and is now characterised by a very simplified mode of worship mainly based on pure devotion (*bhakti*).

Puri, Bhubaneswar and Jajpur in particular, the most important pilgrimage centres of Orissa, attract more people of heterogeneous character. By way of going round the *kṣetra*s they do not fail to visit the important Śākta monuments. At Puri, for instance, the pilgrims and devotees' visit to the Śākta-Vaiṣṇava shrines of Vimalā and Lakṣmī is a 'must' as a part of their circumambulation round the temple complex of Śrī Jagannātha. Similar is the situation at Bhubaneswar, where the people, in course of going round the temple town, throng the Śākta shrines of Gaurī, Gopāliṇī and such other goddesses worshipped in the Liṅgarāja temple complex. In the other *pīṭha*s, the Śākta shrines are the only attractions.

The genuinely Śākta-Tāntric element, which was most likely preponderant in the cult pattern observed at the eight Caṇḍī *pīṭha*s of Orissa in times past, has been in most cases watered down owing to the penetration of the ideals of Vaiṣṇavism (in the form of Jagannātha cult) into all of the sub-currents of Orissan religious thought starting from the twelfth century AD. The *pīṭha* presided over by goddess Vimalā at Purī was probably the first to be (at least in part) Vaiṣṇavised on the initiative of the Gaṅga monarchs, who definitively included that Śākta shrine within the walls of the temple of Jagannātha. This imperial dynasty of Orissa also saw to include the ancient (and long independent) cult of goddess Virajā of Jājpur in the orthodox *pañca-devatā* worship-system having, of course, Viṣṇu/Jagannātha at the apex. A similar process of Vaiṣṇavisation was carried out, as it has been shown, in connection with the cult of goddess Maṅgalā of Kakatpur, who came ultimately to be regarded as the 'mother' of Lord Jagannātha.

Some typical Śākta-Tāntric cultic features are, at any rate, noticed in all of the eight above discussed *pīṭhas*. The traditional sacrifice of a buffalo by decapitation is, for instance, still in vogue at the shrines of Virajā, Carcikā and Bhagavatī. The shrine of Bhagavatī is likely to have been once, as above indicated, a seat of human sacrifices too. The three mentioned goddesses also accept offerings of goats, sheep and fowls, which are the animals normally immolated to other Candīs such as Vimalā, Maṅgalā and Hiṅgulā. At the *pīṭha* of Sāralā animal sacrifices were reportedly suppressed fifty years back, so that it is only in regard to the *pīṭha* of Gopālinī that it appears difficult now trace the past prevalence of animal sacrifices.

From the theological viewpoint, the eight Caṇḍīs of Orissa represent as many aspects of the Mahādevī. Such a wide gamut of aspects of the female divine principle provide the traditional worship system associated with the eight *pīṭhas* in question with an articulate doctrinal basis. Virajā is, in this respect, conceived as a form of Kālī primarily connected with ancestor-worship; Vimalā, as a form of Bhairavī; Maṅgalā, as an auspicious form of Durgā; Carcikā, as a variant form of Cāmuṇḍā; Sāralā, as a composite deity showing the characteristics of both Durgā and Sarasvatī; Hiṅgulā, as a fire-*śakti*; Bhagavatī, as another manifestation of Durgā/Kālī; and Bhuvaneśvarī, as the Tāntric aspect of Pārvatī.

Finally, the fact that at least four of these goddesses (Virajā, Bhuvaneśvarī or Gopālinī, Hiṅgulā and Carcikā) acted in different socio-historical contexts as the tutelary deities of this or that royal dynasty of Orissa (no matter as to whether a paramount or a minor one), points out the links between the Orissan tradition of the Caṇḍī *pīṭhas* and the ideology of regality. In other words, one of the most important functions attributed to these goddesses was that of defending the socio-political order, as well as reinforcing the military power of the kingdoms ruled over by the dynasties that put themselves under their protection. This role of theirs, having a theological equivalent in the numerous pan-Indian myths bespeaking the glory of Durgā/Caṇḍī, the all-powerful slayer of different mighty *asuras* and the protectress of cosmic order, appears to have been emphasised to the utmost after the Muslim powers of North India began to menace the independence of Orissa in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries AD. A series of folk legends pivoted upon the supernatural 'resistance' put up by some of these Caṇḍīs to the assaults launched against their respective shrines by the Muslim invaders led by Kālāpahār in AD 1568 indicate that these goddesses, by that time, were regarded by the Oriyās as the defenders of the country from foreign enemies.

4

Manifestations of Śakti

THERE are numerous manifestations of Śakti with bewildering varieties of nomenclature and iconographic prescriptions recorded in the Vedic texts, Purāṇas, Upapurāṇas and Tantras. Through the passage of time many goddesses were shrouded in oblivion and a host of new ones emerged in accordance with the need of situations. In referring to the sacred literature we do not find the iconographic features of many *devīs*, and even though the iconography of a multitude of them is available, unfortunately they have often not been represented in sculptural art nor in painting. Moreover, several goddesses worshipped in the folk communities scattered throughout India are found in aniconic form, having the recorded names or the nomenclature of their own.

I have, in the present chapter, attempted to pay attention to those Hindu goddesses who have earned all-India celebrity and popularity, have chronological development patronised by the royal families and the people, and exhibit the icons with art style of the concerned period and of the particular school.

The important such Śākta manifestations dealt with here in a succession are Durgā (in the iconographic forms as Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, Siṁhavāhinī Durgā and standing Durgā respectively), Cāmuṇḍā, the Divine Mothers (seven or eight such goddesses worshipped together), the sow-goddess Vārāhī, Sixty-Four Yoginīs (sixty-four terrible images of *yoginīs* enshrined in a single structure), serpent goddesses, Pārvatī and finally Śrī-Lakṣmī.

Some other goddesses that are found in the sculptural representation in Orissa have not been included in my discussion in view of the fact that they never attained the cult status in separate shrines and *pīṭhas* for them in this land. For a similar reason, the Śākta-Śaiva or Śākta-Vaiṣṇava composite icons like those representing Ardhanārīśvara, Umāmaheśvara, the marriage scene of Śiva and Pārvatī, Kṛṣṇa-Ekānaṁśā-Balarāma, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Lakṣmī-Nṛsiṁha, Lakṣmī-Varāha, will not be discussed here despite their wide distribution over the territory of Orissa. Only a small number of such syncretistic icons, particularly in the cases of the Kṛṣṇaite Trinity and Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, gained sporadically the cult status in Orissa.

Durgā

Durgā, one of the most eminent goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, emerged as a formidable warrior deity to protect the universe from the destructive power of the demons. Her popularity as the Mahādevī or Mahāsurī (great goddess) never receded even after the lapse of thousands of years. In the course of her rise to a pre-eminent position in the Hindu pantheon Durgā multiplied her manifestations for specific purposes, thus, earning an abiding popularity in the Hindu world. The abundant archaeological remains and loose sculptures of different periods spread throughout the country, numerous myths associated with her highlighting her exploits and miraculous power, her profuse representation in the plastic art, her emergence from the combined energies of the Hindu gods (according to the Purāṇic accounts) bespeak her hoary antiquity and wide celebrity as the World Mother.[1]

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

The origin of Durgā is as mysterious as her rise to the most prominent position. Some scholars have tried to trace her origin from the pre-Vedic cultures. According to such scholars, in the primitive societies the entire culture centred round the mother, who was the symbol of generation and the actual producer of life. At the dawn of social evolution maternity was held in high esteem, the mother being the central figure of religion.[2] In the view of J. Marshall, who excavated the Indus Valley sites, Śakti cult evolved in India out of the so-called Mother-Goddess cult, closely associated with the cult of the so-called proto-Śiva. Śiva and Śakti, the dual deities, were, according to that scholar, the principal deities of the non-Āryan people of the Indus civilization.[3] This Mother Goddess of the matriarchal society formed the nucleus of the Śākta principle in pre-Vedic times.[4]

From the Vedic period onwards we get ample reference of goddess Durgā in various forms. The name Durgā finds mention in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka.*[5] In the *Khilarātri-sūkta* Durgā is stated to have three important manifestations: Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī and Mahāsarasvatī.[6]

In the Upaniṣads the concept of *Brahman* is associated with that of Śakti. The feminine personification of the universal life force finds an Upaniṣadic description in the form of Umā-Haimavatī Durgā. According to the description contained in the *Kena Upaniṣad*, the great goddess of the non-Āryans manifested herself to the host of the Āryan gods proving her superiority to them.[7] In fact, the Upaniṣads brought about a syncreticism of two antagonistic traditions (non-Āryan and Āryan). The later Śākta Upaniṣads enhanced the status of the Devī in a philosophical garb. The *Devī Upaniṣad* relates the personifications of Śakti — Durgā, Mahālakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Vaiṣṇavī — as Brahmasvarūpiṇī. Durgā is here depicted as Mahāvidyā Viśvarūpiṇī, refulgent like the morning sun, relieving her devotees from the pains of worldly existence and fulfilling all their desires. She is the goddess of nationality. She is the unborn, infinite, incomprehensible personification of the whole universe. She is Durgā (the Unattainable), beyond her there is nothing.[8]

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[1] H.C. Das, 'Iconography of Śākta Divinities', unpublished manuscript.

[2] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 1-2.

[3] J. Marshall, ed., *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, London, 1931, I, p. 107.

[4] V. Mishra, *Mahiṣamardinī*, New Delhi, 1984, p. 1.

[5] *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, 3rd edn., Ananda Ashrama Sanskrit Series, Poona, 1967-69, 10.1.7.

[6] *Ṛgveda Saṁhitā*, ed. Satvalekar, Ajmer, 1940, X.127.

In the *Mahābhārata* the name Durgā is mentioned along with the names of different goddesses in a hymn addressed by Arjuna in the form of a prayer to the goddesses Kumārī, Kālī, Kapālī, Karālī, Bhadrakālī, Mahākālī, Caṇḍī, Caṇḍā, Tāriṇī, Kātyāyanī, Kṛṣṇā, Durgā, etc., who are there depicted as adorned with jewels and different weapons.[9] Yudhiṣṭhira's invocation to goddess Durgā gives a clear picture of her as the war goddess, killer of Mahiṣāsura (the buffalo-demon). Here she is depicted as four-faced, four-armed and holding a noose, bow, arrow and disk in her hands.[10] In other contexts in the epics Durgā is said to be worshipped by the Śavaras, Barbaras and Pulindas (the aboriginal tribes, possibly belonging to the Austro-Asiatic ethnic stock, that inhabited Middle India in ancient times). She is also described as Aparṇā (not covered even with a garment made of leaves), Nagnaśavarī (the naked Śavara woman) and Parṇaśavarī (the leaf-clad Śavara woman). An amalgamation of Āryan and non-Āryan elements is, thus, found in the character of the goddess.[11]

In the *Harivaṁśa* the name Vindhyavāsinī (an epithet of Durgā indicating her abiding in the still unexplored Vindhya Range) is very popular, of course with several other appellations such as Kālī, Kapālī, Caṇḍī, Kātyāyanī, etc. Here she is described as pervading the whole universe, in appearance having eighteen arms, decorated with various ornaments, clothes, headgear and garlands, propitiated by the thieves and robbers for her favour.[12] It is clear from the above facts that goddess Durgā, originally associated with mountains, hill tribes, thieves and robbers, crept at a certain stage of religious development into the Āryan culture. Both non-Āryan and Āryan elements, mixed together, elevated the status of Mahādevī Durgā.

Durgā was raised to the highest position in the pantheon by the Purāṇas. The *Devī-*

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[7] *Kena Upaniṣad*, Bombay, 1927, III.25.

[8] P. Kumar, *Śakti Cult in Ancient India*, Varanasi, 1974, p. 44.

[9] *Mahābhārata*, ed. Satvalekar, Bombay, 1940, IV. 6. 17-19.

[10] *Ibid.*, IV.6.2.

[11] H.C. Das, 'Iconography of Śākta Divinities', unpublished manuscript.

[12] *Harivaṁśa Purāṇa*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, s.d., *Viṣṇu Parva* 109.50-52.

Māhātmya section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (which is a pantheistic and non-sectarian Purāṇa) conceives Mahiṣamardinī Durgā as a full-fledged warrior goddess in the form of Caṇḍī or Caṇḍikā. Born out of the consolidated and refulgent energies of the gods, her countenance dazzling like thousands of suns, she pervaded the three worlds even forcing the gods themselves to bow down as a mark of respect to the all-powerful Goddess. Fully equipped with the weapons donated to her by the gods, she gave out an exceedingly frightful war-cry, engaged the demons and their leaders in terrific battles, vanished them and finally overpowered the *asura* Mahiṣa, piercing his body with the trident when the demon came out of the decapitated carcass of the buffalo. So goddess Durgā became Mahiṣamardinī.

The story of Durgā's combat with the *asura* Mahiṣa, resulting in latter's final annihilation, was recorded in several other Purāṇas and Upapurāṇas which further popularised this mythic event by giving a variety of names to the Mahādevī. The *Matsya Purāṇa*, *Varāha Purāṇa*, *Vāmana Purāṇa*, *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Skanda Purāṇa*, *Kālikā Purāṇa*, *Padma Purāṇa*, etc., recorded this story by interpolating interesting anecdotes, thus, further highlighting the greatness of the Mahādevī. She was given numerous names by different Purāṇas, so many that, in course of time, the nomenclature of Durgā consisted of one hundred-eight or even thousand epithets.[13]

However, the *Devī-Māhātmya* relates three important exploits of Durgā in connection with the protection of the cosmos and of *dharma* from the terrible menace coming from the *asuras* (demons). They are, in a succession: (a) the battle with Madhu-Kaiṭabha; (b) the combat with Mahiṣāsura; (c) the battle with Śumbha-Niśumbha, Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa, Raktabīja and their hosts.

Since the time of the *Bhagavad Gītā* the idea of Viṣṇu's descending to the world from time to time as an incarnation (*avatāra*) in order to set right the disorder has been well-known in the Hindu tradition. In following the *avatāra* theology the *Devī-Māhātmya* conceives Durgā as a female incarnation. Like Viṣṇu, the great Goddess creates, maintains and destroys the world, intervenes when there is disorder, and is approached by the male gods in time of severe distress. Her appearance as Durgā to redeem the world from the clutches of the demons conforms to the Brāhmaṇical theology of incarnation. The author(s) of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, by creating a powerful myth, highlighted the might and supremacy of Durgā.[14] Durgā's more intimate connection with Viṣṇu is more perceptible in the Madhu-Kaiṭabha episode. When the whole world was tortured by the two demons, Brahmā invoked the *māyā-śakti* of Viṣṇu, who was sleeping on the serpent Śeṣa resting upon the Cosmic Ocean. Having been pleased at the prayer of Brahmā, the Devī became active and awakened Viṣṇu — whom she, in her aspect as Yoganidrā, was keeping asleep in a sleep of reintegration during the great cosmic night — in order that he might be ready for the battle against the two demons, who were immediately annihilated by Viṣṇu. The *māyā-śakti* of Viṣṇu is invoked in this episode of the *Devī-Māhātmya* in different names such as Mahāmāyā, Yoganidrā, Mahāvidyā, Mahāmedhā, Mahāsurī, Mahādevī, Kālarātrī, etc.[15]

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[13] H.C. Das, 'Iconography of Śākta Divinities', unpublished manuscript.

[14] D. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, Delhi (etc.), 1986, pp. 101-2.

In the Mahiṣāsura episode, the Devī is more connected with Śiva than with Viṣṇu (who, nevertheless, plays a very prominent role in creating the Goddess out of his energy). Durgā, indeed, finally slays the buffalo-demon with the trident, that is, the most characteristic among Śiva's weapons. In the Śumbha-Niśumbha episode, on the contrary, she appears as an independent incarnation. In her independent form the Devī is conceived as the supreme *Brahman* pervading the whole universe. All gods and goddesses are her creation or part of her. She is alone in the universe, no one is second to her.[16] The independent character of the Devī is more clearly marked in her manifestation as Caṇḍī (the Wrathful), the ruthless slayer of demons, than in her manifestation as Viṣṇu-*māyā*.

In the evolution of the Mahādevī theology two trends of thought, namely, the creation of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā from the concentrated energies of the gods and the creation of the Śākta *pīṭhas* from the dead body of Satī, the daughter of Dakṣa identified with Umā-Haimavatī or Pārvatī, were amalgamated. This process was particularly marked during the Gupta period, when the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which conceived the most powerful war-goddess as Mahādevī, was compiled. Unlike Durgā, who is a virgin warrior goddess, Pārvatī owns Śiva as her husband and has a mild character. But Pārvatī's origin is most likely connected with the mountains and the non-Āryan tribes living therein, just as it is the case with Durgā. The composers and compilers of the Mahāpurāṇas, Upapurāṇas and Tantras possibly combined Pārvatī with Durgā to superimpose their superiority over the male-dominated universe.

ICONOGRAPHY OF MAHIṢAMARDINĪ DURGĀ IN ORISSA

The Purāṇas and other texts have prescribed different iconic types of goddess Durgā, which are more or less similar except in the number of arms and poses attributed to her.

Among the three general canonical modes of iconic representation of Durgā (Mahiṣamardinī, Siṁhavāhinī and the goddess in a standing pose), the first one, in which the deity is depicted as being engaged in slaying the buffalo-demon, is no doubt the earliest and the most diffused in Orissa. The development of the Mahiṣamardinī sculptural type has a very long history in the State, which starts in the Gupta Age with the installation of an image belonging to this class as the presiding deity of the very old Śākta shrine of Virajā at Jajpur and culminates in the modern period with the introduction of the ritual custom, having probably originated in Bengal, of adoring huge and lavishly decorated ten-armed clay images of the goddess slaying Mahiṣa on the occasion of the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā*, that are at first housed in special pavilions for ceremonial worship to be subsequently taken in procession and finally immersed in rivers or tanks.[17]

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[15] *Devī-Māhātmya*, 1.49-78, quoted in T.B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and A Study of Its Interpretation*, Albany, 1991 (all the subsequent references to the *Devī-Māhātmya* contained in the present chapter are taken from this translation).

[16] S.B. Dasgupta, *Bhārater Śakti Sādhana O Śākta Sāhitya*, Calcutta, 1932, p. 57 (in Bengālī).

The extant Mahiṣamardinī icons of Orissa, dating for the most part from the early and middle medieval periods, number legions, for which reason to give here a complete description of them is impossible; we shall, thus, limit ourselves to group these icons into some broad classes on the basis of their iconographic features, their major or minor antiquity and their function in the temple ritualistic pattern. Among such images, only the most noticeable from the artistic point of view will be discussed in detail.

In his classification of the Mahiṣamardinī images, H. von Stietencron identifies five types of sculptural representation of the Goddess-Mahiṣa encounter:[18]

(1) goddess wrestling with a wild buffalo having his neck upturned under the pressure of the former's knee;

(2) goddess raising the buffalo up from behind by pulling his tail with her front left hand and piercing his neck with her trident by her front right;

(3) goddess struggling with a demon having human body and buffalo head;

(4) goddess struggling with a demon in human form issuing out of the carcass of a decapitated buffalo;

(5) goddess standing in an axial posture upon the severed head of the slain buffalo-demon.

Of these five classes of images, types 1 and 2, characterised by the depiction of the *asura* Mahiṣa in theriomorphic form, are not attested in any text and can be, therefore, considered to be the earliest, while the last three find mention in various medieval works. The demon in a hybrid buffalo-human shape, characterising types 3 and 4, is clearly portrayed in the *Devī-Māhātmya*'s narrative of the final combat between Durgā and Mahiṣāsura,[19] even though the iconographic representation of a buffalo-headed human demon is not attested in that most authoritative Purāṇic work composed in the Gupta Age. Finally, type 5 is confined to South India, particularly to the Tamil country, where it made its appearance since the Pallava period (*ca.* AD 325-800).[20]

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[17] D.N. Patnaik, *Festivals of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1982, p. 56.

[18] H. von Stietencron, 'Die Göttin Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī: Mythos, Darstellung und geschichtliche Rolle bei der Hinduisierung Indiens', in *Visible Religion: Annual for Religious Iconography, Vol. II: Representations of Gods*, Leiden, 1983, pp. 127-36.

[19] *Devī-Māhātmya*, 3.37-39.

The Orissan images of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā all belong to types 2, 3 and 4 of Stietencron's classification, with a clean numerical superiority of those in which the demon is depicted in a hybrid buffalo-human form over those in which the demon is depicted in theriomorphic form. The main iconographic features of these three classes of Śākta images of Orissa are given below in a succession.

(a) The earliest mode of sculptural representation of the Durgā-Mahiṣa fight to be found in Orissa is the one according to which the demon is depicted in full animal (theriomorphic) form. This is a very rare iconographic motif in the State, yet it covers chronologically the entire arc of its sacred artistic activity from the Gupta Age to the later medieval period.[21] The oldest extant Mahiṣamardinī icon of Orissa, serving as the presiding deity of Virajā temple at Jajpur, belongs to this class, which, as above suggested, includes some among the earliest Indian pieces of sculpture representing the mythic final combat between Durgā and Mahiṣa.

The image of Virajā represents a two-armed goddess holding a spear which pierces the body of the buffalo with her right hand while she is uplifting his hind part by holding his tail with her left. She tramples on the buffalo's neck with her right foot. According to the Orissan scholar G.C. Patnaik, the traditional mount of Durgā, the lion, is not present in the cult icon.[22] Such iconographic features, including the absence of the lion, tally with those of the Gupta images of Mahiṣamardinī to be found in northern and central India,[23] which has led the scholars to assign the cult image of Virajā to the Gupta epoch. The remains of a small temple basement located at Kalaspur in the outskirts of Jajpur, traditionally regarded by the local people as the original seat of goddess Virajā (whose representative icon is presently enshrined in a relatively modern temple), have been assigned by K.C. Panigrahi to the early Gupta age,[24] with this corroborating the hypothesis that the cult image of Virajā be the earliest extant Mahiṣamardinī image of Orissa. As above indicated, the sculptural representation of

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[20] T.V. Mahalingam, 'The Cult of Śakti in Tamilnad', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *The Śakti Cult and Tārā*, Calcutta, 1967, p. 23.

[21] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, Leiden (etc.), 1987, p. 1067.

[22] G.C. Patnaik, 'Development of Śāktism at Jajpur', in M.N. Das, ed., *Sidelights on History and Culture of Orissa*, Cuttack, 1977, p. 364.

[23] J.N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd edn., Calcutta, 1956, p. 498.

[24] K.C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa (Hindu Period)*, Cuttack, 1981, pp. 370-1.

Durgā uplifting the buffalo-demon in theriomorphic form by his hindquarters is neither attested in the *Devī-Māhātmya* nor in any other ancient text. This suggests that the cult image of Virajā may date from an earlier phase than that of the composition of the *Devī-Māhātmya* itself, or at least, that it was inspired by a different tradition.

In this last connection, it is worth noticing that at the two Śākta shrines of Orissa dedicated to goddess Baṛārāul, having a Kondh origin and respectively located at Balaskumpa and at Bandhagarh (both in Phulbani district), the buffalo is still today sacrificed to the Devī in a very peculiar fashion bearing some resemblance with the iconographic representation of Mahiṣamardinī under discussion. The animal, in fact, is killed by an Oriyā Śākta priest belonging to a kṣatriya caste while a Kondh priest stands behind it pulling his tail.[25] The iconography of the goddess killing the buffalo-demon while pulling his tail upward, marking the ancient cult image of Virajā of Jajpur, might, therefore, have derived, at least under some aspect, from the rite of buffalo-sacrifice as anciently performed by some non-Āryan peoples of Orissa as well as of other parts of North India, where this iconographic mode was already known in the Kuṣāṇa period (*ca.* first-second centuries AD).[26]

After the image of goddess Virajā at Jajpur, next in order of chronology may be placed a two-armed Mahiṣamardinī example that was once contained in the temple of Someśvara, located in the outskirts of Kakatpur (Puri district). This Śākta cult image, closely resembling that of Virajā of Jajpur, is assignable to the post-Gupta period.[27] Another very ancient image of Mahiṣamardinī presenting the buffalo-demon in full animal form was recovered from a Śākta brick temple brought to light by the Orissan archaeologists on a mound located in the Maraguda Valley (Kalahandi district). This cult image, representing the deity as four-armed and as standing in a quite unusual *ālīḍha* (archer's) pose with the lion at her feet, may be assigned to the Gupta or to the post-Gupta epoch.[28]

Two early medieval examples of this class of Mahiṣāmardinī images, both four-armed, are noticed at Bhubaneswar, respectively on the spire of Paraśurāmeśvara temple (seventh century AD) and on that of Mārkaṇḍeśvara temple (eighth century AD). In either example the goddess holds a sword and a trident (with which she pierces the

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25. N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Boudh-Khondmals District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1983, pp. 373-4.
26. T.B. Coburn, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
27. H.C. Das, 'Brāhmaṇical Tāntric Art of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXIX, No. 1, p. 119.
28. J.P. Singhdeo, 'Temples of Nawapara Sub-Division', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXIV, Nos. 1 and 2, pp. 19-21.

buffalo's rump) in her right hands and a shield in her uplifted left hand while she is pressing the animal's head with her right foot.[29]

The presiding goddess of the Śākta shrine of Bāliharacaṇḍī, lying near the seashore at the distance of about 20 km to the south-west of Puri, is an eight-armed Mahiṣamardinī with the demon depicted in theriomorphic form. The image, as well as the temple in which it was originally installed (now replaced by a modern one), are assignable to the Bhauma-kara period (*ca.* eighth-tenth centuries AD).[30]

Two-armed images of Mahiṣamardinī presenting the buffalo-demon in full animal form are affixed to the exterior walls of the Śiva temple of Beraboi, belonging to the late Somavaṁśī period (*ca.* AD 1100) and in those of Garudipanchana and Tangi, belonging to the Imperial Gaṅga period (*ca.* second half of the twelfth century AD and first half of the thirteenth century AD respectively).[31] This clearly shows that the ancient iconographic motif of Durgā slaying the demon in buffalo-form while uplifting him by his hindquarters, although rarely found, was popular in Orissa till the later medieval period.

(b) In order of time, the second mode of sculptural representation of the Durgā-Mahiṣa encounter adopted by the Orissan sculptors is the one in which the goddess is depicted as struggling with a buffalo-headed human demon. This iconographic motif spread all over the Deccan between the sixth and ninth centuries AD as a part of the *bhakti* movement of Śāktism patronised by different royal dynasties that reigned in that period of Indian history.[32] In Orissa, this was the most popular mode of depicting the fight between Durgā and Mahiṣāsura up to the tenth century AD.[33]

In the all-India context, the best known specimens of this iconographic mode are the panel carved in high-relief inside the Mahiṣamardinī cave at Mahabalipuram (Pallava art, seventh century AD) and the one, similarly carved in high-relief, which is found at the Kailāśanātha temple of Ellora (Rāṣṭrakūṭa art, eighth century AD). In both these famous sculptural panels the Devī is shown as riding the lion while vigorously attacking Mahiṣāsura, depicted as a full-scale man of her stature having the head of a buffalo (in the example from Mahabalipuram) or human head with buffalo-horns (in the example from Ellora). In either sculpture other fierce demons are depicted below

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[29] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1067.

[30] H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXX, Nos. 2, 3 and 4: Glimpses of Orissan Art and Culture, p. 133.

[31] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1067.

[32] T.B. Coburn, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

[33] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1063.

Mahiṣa, with this adding a dramatic feature to the scene. The Mahiṣamardinī images from Orissa belonging to the class at issue, however, differ very much from the ones found at Mahabalipuram and at Ellora. Though the vigour and aggressiveness being displayed by the Devī in the act of attacking the buffalo-headed human demon are common to the Orissan examples and to those of Mahabalipuram and Ellora, yet the mode of depicting her fight with Mahiṣāsura is given a modified form by the sculptors of Orissa. In the images of Orissa the demon is, in fact, always alone in facing the assault of the Goddess. He is usually depicted from behind, his legs wide apart and the buffalo-head violently bent backwards by Durgā's major left hand. The Devī does not ride the lion as she does in the sculptural panels from Mahabalipuram and Ellora, rather she is depicted in a graceful *tribhaṅga* pose (namely, with her body silhouette forming three bends) with her raised right foot planted on the demon's left shoulder. The lion generally attacks the demon from one of the lower corners of the sculptural composition.[34] Some Mahiṣamardinī images of this type are to be found in Andhra Pradesh and in Tamil Nadu too,[35] with this possibly suggesting that this iconographic mode was more characteristic of the Deccan rather than of North India.

The earliest examples of this iconography in Orissa are the one loosely placed within the compound of the Śatrughneśvara temple group (late sixth century AD, *Pl.* XXV) and the one appearing on the spire of Paraśurāmeśvara temple (seventh century AD), both situated in Bhubaneswar. The former piece of sculpture is only tentatively assigned to the class of images under discussion in that only its upper portion has come to us, so that the figure of the demon is not visible. In both the images the Devī holds a sword raised above her head with her upper right hand and a trident with her lower right. She is six-armed in the image of Paraśurāmeśvara temple and appears four-armed in that belonging to the Śatrughneśvara temple group, even though also the latter may have previously owned a third couple of arms, now no more visible since the sculpture is broken.

Another early specimen of this class of Mahiṣamardinī images serves as the presiding deity of the small reconstructed temple of Śikharacaṇḍī, rising on the top of a hillock near Patia in the Bhubaneswar area. On the basis of its archaic architectural features this temple is generally assigned by the Orissan scholars to the Gupta age,[36] although T.E. Donaldson assigns it to the closing part of the Śailodbhava period (*ca.* seventh-eighth centuries AD).[37] Be that as it may, the image of Mahiṣamardinī enshrined therein is probably the earliest extant specimen of the eight-armed variety of images representing the goddess struggling with a buffalo-headed human demon, which got a wide diffusion over central Orissa, and particularly in the city of Bhubaneswar, in the Bhauma-kara period (eighth-tenth centuries AD).

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[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 1063-4.

[35] B. Sahai, *Iconography of Some Important Minor Hindu and Buddhist Deities*, New Delhi, 1975, p. 193.

[36] K.S. Behera, *Temples of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1993, p. 15.

The standard iconography of Mahiṣamardinī in the Bhauma period, marked by the irresistible ascent of Śākta-Tantrism in Orissa, shows the goddess as eight-, ten- or twelve-armed variously. The common iconographic feature of most of Mahiṣamardinī images dating from this period is the depiction of the demon in the guise of a buffalo-headed warrior.

The weapons wielded by the Devī in the eight-armed sub-class of images are: the trident (*triśūla*), invariably held in the major right hand; the sword (*khaḍga*), held by an uplifted back right arm; the arrow (*bāṇa*), held in the lower right hand; the thunderbolt (*vajra*) or the disk (*cakra*), held in the additional right hand; the shield (*ḍhāla* or *kheṭaka*), held by an uplifted back left arm; the stringed bow (*dhanu*), held in the middle left hand; the serpent noose (*nāga-pāśa*), held in the additional left hand and alternatively shown in the act of biting the buffalo-demon or in that of encircling his neck to strangle him; finally, the major left arm invariably pushes back the demon's head.[38] All of the aforesaid weapons are mentioned in the second episode of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, relating of the fight between Durgā and Mahiṣāsura; they are there described as the gifts made by various gods to the Devī in order that the latter might defeat the very powerful buffalo-demon in battle. Thus, the trident is said in the *Devī-Māhātmya* to be the gift of Śiva, who, in his Kāla (Cosmic Time) aspect, is there said to have given the Goddess the sword and shield too; the disk is reported to be the gift of Kṛṣṇa, i.e., of Viṣṇu; the bow and two quivers filled with arrows, that of Vāyu; the thunderbolt, that of Indra; and the (serpent) noose, that of Varuṇa.[39] The latter weapon appears to be more important than the others in that it helps the Goddess with a will of its own. The attribution of this *nāga-pāśa* to Durgā probably indicates her association with the ancient ophidic cults diffused among the non-Āryan peoples of India, of which the Vedic god Varuṇa, the Lord of Waters, may be considered to be a Sanskritised hypostasis.

The most noticeable specimens of this iconographic mode are to be found in the Vaitāl (two examples), Śiśireśvara and Mohinī temples at Bhubaneswar (*Pl.* IX and *fig.* 1), in the Śaiva temple complex of Kualo in Dhenkanal district, in the premises of Śukleśvara temple at Suklesvara and of Trilocaneśvara temple at Kundesvara (Cuttack district), and in the compound of Madhukeśvara temple at Mukhalingam (northern Andhra Pradesh), where the *nāga-pāśa* is replaced by a bell. As above indicated, all of these sculptures are the offspring of the Bhauma art movement.

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[37] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, Leiden, 1985, p. 9.

[38] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, pp. 1063-4.

[39] *Devī-Māhātmya*, 2.19-23.

The ten-armed variety of images depicting Durgā as slaying a buffalo-headed human demon became as popular in Orissa in the Bhauma-kara epoch as the eight-armed one. In this sub-class of images the right additional hand holds a disk (which in the eight-armed variety alternates with a thunderbolt, *vajra*) while the left one holds a battle-axe (*paraśu*), one of the traditional weapons of Śiva that, according to the *Devī-Māhātmya*, was presented to Durgā by Viśvakarman, the divine architect of the universe.[40] The best preserved images of this sub-class are to be found in the temple of Śiśireśvara at Bhubaneswar and in the Śaiva temple complex of Kualo.

Twelve-armed images of Durgā portrayed as slaying a buffalo-headed human demon are rare in Orissa. They are confined to one example from Kualo, one acting as the presiding deity of Dvāravāsinī temple at Bhubaneswar, and one recovered from Dharmasala (Cuttack district), now preserved in the Orissa State Museum (*fig.* 2). This sub-class of images, generally dating from the later part of the Bhauma-kara period (*ca.* tenth century AD),[41] is typically Tāntric: the two additional hands of the Goddess, in fact, respectively hold a severed human head (*chinnamastaka*) and crush the neck of a figure placed in the lower part of the sculpture.

(c) The latest and most long-lasting mode of depicting the Durgā-Mahiṣa fight adopted by the Orissan sculptors of the medieval period is the one in which the demon is represented as emerging in human form from the neck of his buffalo-shape soon after the animal has been decapitated by the Devī and as desperately trying to escape or deliver the last attack against the all-powerful goddess. This refined iconographic motif, which spread all over India in connection with the development of the *bhakti* movement of Śāktism, suits the *Devī-Māhātmya*'s textual account to a greater extent than the Mahiṣamardinī images depicting the demon as a buffalo-headed warrior. In fact, the final metamorphosis of the multiform Mahiṣāsura, as it is described in the *Devī-Māhātmya* (3.37-39), apparently consists of an attempted transformation from buffalo-form to human form, with the latter coming forth fighting out of the mouth of the buffalo in consequence of the Goddess' final assault; however, before he can fully emerge, Durgā, placing her foot on the buffalo's throat, decapitates the human form.[42]

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[40] *Devī-Māhātmya*, 2.26.

[41] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, pp. 1064-5.

[42] H. von Stietencron, *art. cit.*, pp. 134-6.

> This mode of depicting the killing of the buffalo-demon by Durgā is referred to in the *Devī-Māhātmya* (3.39) as *ardhaniṣkrānta* ('half-emerged', a term hinting at Mahiṣa's aforesaid metamorphosis). This mode of representing the Durgā-Mahiṣa combat was introduced in the all-India context as early as the Gupta period.[43]

This iconographic mode was very popular in Orissa from the beginning of the Bhauma period (eighth century AD) till the later medieval period. Starting from about the end of the tenth century AD it gradually replaced the iconographic mode showing the demon in a hybrid buffalo-human form till it became the standard regional mode of representing Durgā's mythical combat with Mahiṣa. The earliest Mahiṣamardinī images of Orissa belonging to this sub-class are in most cases eight- or ten-armed. The ten-armed variety, which is more commonly found in Orissa than the eight-armed one,[44] is worshipped at many places as Bhaṭṭārikā or as Bhagavatī according to age-old Tāntric rituals. The appellation Bhaṭṭārikā simply means 'Noble Lady', or also 'the Honourable', while the appellation Bhagavatī is the feminine form of the term *bhagavat* (rich, fortunate, prosperous, glorious, illustrious, venerable, etc.).[45]

In the earlier examples of this sub-class of images Durgā is generally depicted as placing her uplifted right foot on the rump of the beheaded buffalo while her left foot is placed on the ground, or on the back of her lion mount in the later examples. The demon in human form is generally depicted as placing one of his feet on the buffalo-carcass out of which he is emerging (in most cases in a fighting attitude) while the lion is biting him. In the earlier examples the goddess grips the demon's throat with her major left hand while in the later ones the function of strangling the demon is transferred to her *nāga-pāśa*; therefore, also in this sub-class of images, the serpent continues to be represented as a powerful and efficient 'ally' of Durgā as much as the lion, with this possibly indicating the continuance of the alliance between Śakti and Nāga cults.[46]

The weapons brandished by Durgā in the eight- and ten-armed sub-classes of images under discussion are generally the same appearing in the images of the same varieties that present the demon as a buffalo-headed human figure, with the addition, according to changeable combinations, of a spear (*śakti*), which in the *Devī-Māhātmya* is stated to be the gift of Agni,[47] a bell (*ghaṇṭa*), a 'weapon' that is traditionally believed to drive the demons away and that, according to the *Devī-Māhātmya*, was donated to Durgā by Indra, who took it from his mount the elephant Airāvata,[48] and, finally, a goad for driving elephants (*aṅkuśa*)

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43. B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
44. H.C. Das, *art. cit.*, p. 109.
45. M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, new edn., Oxford, 1988, pp. 743 and 915.
46. T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1066.
47. *Devī-Māhātmya*, 2.20.
48. *Ibid.*, 2.21.

a weapon that is not attested in the *Devī-Māhātmya*. In some examples the Devī holds with one of her left hands a severed human head, representing, as already suggested, a Tāntric iconographic feature.

The Mahiṣamardinī images from Orissa belonging to this class are numberless and are distributed all over the territory of the State. A large number of them is still nowadays under worship in the Prachi Valley, an ancient area of diffusion of Śākta-Tāntric cults situated in Puri district, often in association with Cāmuṇḍā images. The reason for this is that Kālī/Cāmuṇḍā is indicated as the most powerful and terrific emanation of the great Goddess in the *Devī-Māhātmya*'s third episode, containing the account of Durgā's fight with the hosts of *asuras* led by Śumbha and Niśumbha. The conjoint worship of Durgā and Cāmuṇḍā was most likely introduced in the area of the Prachi Valley during the Bhauma-kara period thanks to the action of proselytism undertaken there by the Kāpālika sect.[49]

Some very beautiful eight- or ten-armed Mahiṣamardinī images belonging to the class at issue and dating from the Bhauma-kara period or from the subsequent Somavaṁśī period are noticed at Khiching (*fig.* 5) and Hariharpur (Mayurbhanj district), at Shergarh (Baleswar district) (*fig.* 3) and at Baidesvara, Baramba, Suklesvara and Vatesvara (Cuttack district). One of the latest examples of this type of Durgā images, ten-armed, acts as the presiding deity of the temple of Nārāyaṇī near Balugaon (Ganjam district), dating back to about the sixteenth century AD. At Orasahi near Chandbali (Baleswar district) there is a rare twelve-armed example worshipped as Ḍākeśvarī. An eighteen-armed example is found at Nirakarpur (Puri district), while an unique twenty-armed example, recovered from Salebatha (Balangir district), is presently preserved in the Sambalpur University Museum.

The overall iconography of the class of Mahiṣamardinī images presenting the demon while issuing from the decapitated buffalo-carcass possibly amounts to some hundred specimens that cover chronologically the entire historical period ranging from the eighth to sixteenth century of our era.

The most important iconographic innovation, as far as this class of images is concerned, was introduced in the course of the Imperial Gaṅga period (*ca.* AD 1110-1434) owing to the growth in popularity of Vaiṣṇavism. The Mahiṣamardinī images belonging to that period, which are often four-armed, show the goddess as piercing the demon with the trident she holds vertically in her front pair of hands while she is holding a disk (or a bell) and a conch (*śaṅkha*) with her back pair of hands. Although the conch, one of the four characteristic attributes of Viṣṇu, is already mentioned in the *Devī-Māhātmya* as one of the gifts made by

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[49] *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts of Orissa,* vol. V: Tantra Manuscripts, compiled by M.P. Dash, Bhubaneswar, 1965, pp. XXXVIII-XLIII; P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report 1974-75: Prachi Valley*, Bhubaneswar, 1975, pp. 57-61.

Varuṇa to the Devī in order that the latter could kill the buffalo-demon,[50] its representation in the Mahiṣamardinī images of the Imperial Gaṅga period along with the sole disk — another typical attribute of Viṣṇu — indicates that the image of the Devī as the slayer of the buffalo-demon had been, by that time, 'Vaiṣṇavised', the only relic of her past association with Śiva being represented, in the imagery in question, by the trident, which nevertheless invariably appears in all the Mahiṣamardinī images. The finest specimens of this iconographic mode are respectively placed within the sanctum of the temple of Durgā at Motia and in the compound of the temple of Gaṅgeśvarī at Beyalisbati, both situated in Puri district and assigned to the thirteenth century AD.[51]

FUNCTIONS OF THE MAHIṢAMARDINĪ IMAGE IN THE HINDU TEMPLE OF ORISSA

So far in this section the Mahiṣamardinī images from Orissa have been classified into three groups with reference to the form in which the buffalo-demon is portrayed in them. Moreover, a further sub-classification of such images, based on the number of arms displayed by the Devī, has been propounded in order to integrate the discussion with elements more directly pertaining to the sphere of popular Tāntric devotion. In fact, on the general plane, the Mahiṣamardinī images are not distinguished from one another by the devotees on the basis of the appearance of the buffalo-demon, rather they are identified by them according to their being two-, four-, six-armed, and so on. For instance, an *aṣṭabhujā* (eight-armed) Mahiṣamardinī is spiritually experienced by its Tantric votaries as being different from a *daśabhujā* (ten-armed) Mahiṣamardinī. The former's *dhyāna* (the mental picture of a deity used by the devotees to focus their own yogic meditation on the spiritual power embodied by that deity), indeed, differs from the latter's one, so much so that the supernatural powers or *śakti*s embodied by the different varieties of Mahiṣamardinī images in conformity with the number of their arms come to form a complicated scheme out of which a Tāntric devotee has the possibility to choose his own elect form of the deity. It is, thus, Durgā's number of arms, and not the form in which Mahiṣāsura is shown below her, that seems to be really important in the view of a Tāntric devotee, in Orissa as anywhere else in India.

A further scheme of classification of Mahiṣamardinī images may be traced on the basis of their function in the overall temple worship-pattern. In Orissa, an image of Mahiṣamardinī can act as the presiding deity of an independent Śākta temple or of a subservient Śākta shrine lying in the premises of a Śaiva temple. In other contexts, one such image can serve as the side deity (*pārśva-devatā*) or the protective-ring deity (*āvaraṇa-devatā*) of a Śaiva or Śākta temple. The image of Mahiṣamardinī can also function as the representative of the female principle placed beside a Śiva-*liṅga* or, alternatively, beside a Viṣṇu image within the sanctum of a temple dedicated to one of the two supreme male divinities of Hinduism. Finally, the Mahiṣamardinī image is also found in Orissa as the member of a syncretistic cult icon formed by the images of Viṣṇu in Jagannātha form, Śiva in *liṅga* form and Durgā in Mahiṣamardinī form, a sculptural motif characteristic of the Gaṅga period that later on, with the elimination of the already small Śiva-*liṅga*, evolved into the representation of the sole juxtaposed images of Jagannātha and Mahiṣamardinī so as to form the so-called Durgā-Mādhava cult icons.

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[50] *Devī-Māhātmya*, 2.20.

[51] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, II, Leiden, 1986, pp. 585 and 682.

The most eminent Śākta shrines of Orissa among those being presided over by an image of Mahiṣamardinī are the temples of Virajā at Jajpur, of Bāliharacaṇḍī near Puri, of Rāmacaṇḍī near Konarak and of Nārāyaṇī near Balugaon in Ganjam district. Mahiṣamardinī images also preside over a number of less-known Śākta shrines of the State such as the temples of Bānki-muhāṇa Rāmacaṇḍī at Puri, of Dvāravāsinī and of Dakṣiṇacaṇḍī at Bhubaneswar, of Śikharacaṇḍī at Patia near Bhubaneswar, of Durgā at Baidesvara in Cuttack district, of Durgā at Shergarh and of Ḍākeśvarī at Orasahi (both located in Baleswar district), of Caṇḍī at Saintala and of Paṭaneśvarī at Patnagarh (both located in Balangir district). Also several small temples in the Prachi Valley area have as their presiding deity an image of Mahiṣamardinī. In addition to these, an interesting irregular image of Mahiṣamardinī, dating from about the fifteenth century AD and holding among its attributes the lute (*vīṇā*) and the book (*pustaka*), traditionally associated with the patroness of knowledge, Sarasvatī, is worshipped as Sāralā at the homonymous *pīṭha* located at Jhankad in Cuttack district.

The second important function of the Mahiṣamardinī image in the medieval Hindu temple of Orissa is that as *pārśva-devatā*. As such, the image of this deity was installed in one of the side niches in a great number of Śākta and Śaiva temples. So far as purely Śākta shrines are concerned, we find beautiful Mahiṣamardinī images acting so in the temple of goddess Bhaṭṭārikā at Baramba (Cuttack district) and that of goddess Bhagavatī at Banpur (Puri-Ganjam border area). In the Śaiva temples the Mahiṣamardinī image was often installed in the northern main niche of the sanctuary proper (*deul*). The reasons which led the architects and patronisers of the temples to position the image of the Devī north are manifold and cannot be, therefore, illustrated here; it may suffice to say that the north direction, associated with the representative image of the Śakti in a great number of Śaiva temples of the Deccan, Orissa included, appears to correspond to the left side of Śiva. The image of the Śakti is placed to the left of that of Śiva also in all of the syncretistic Śaiva-Śākta icons conceived by the Hindu artists, such as those of Ardhanārīśvara and Umāmaheśvara. In accordance with the principles of sacred geography underlying the construction of Śaiva temples, the north direction corresponds to the left side of Śiva inasmuch as the main entrance of such temples generally faces east, i.e., the direction of sovereignty.[52] The custom of installing an image of the Devī as the north *pārśva-devatā* in the Śaiva temples of Orissa is attested in the *Śilpa-Prakāśa* (II.360-63), an Orissan medieval treaty of temple architecture, written in Sanskrit, which is tentatively assigned by its editors to the later Somavaṁśī period (*ca.* eleventh-twelfth centuries AD). Also in this text the north side of a Śaiva temple is stated to correspond to the left side of Śiva, that is, the one dominated by the female element.[53] The symbolic association of the Śakti with the north direction is noticeable in the very sanctum of the standard Śaiva temple of Orissa, in which the *liṅga* is generally inserted into the *yoni-paṭṭa* (a stone pedestal shaped as a womb's diagram) having its spout-like projection pointing north. It is also worth noticing, in this connection, that many independent Śākta shrines of Orissa, built in all epochs, have their main entrance facing north.

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[52] From a correspondence between Prof. M. Biardeau and the present writer.

It was only during the Bhauma period, marked by the great efflorescence of Śākta-Tantrism in the country, that Mahiṣamardinī images were installed as *pārśva-devatās* in the Śaiva temples of Orissa. Ever before that epoch, and also after it, the standard female side deity of Śaiva temples was the less 'Tāntricised' consort goddess Pārvatī.[54] The replacement of the image of Mahiṣamardinī with that of Pārvatī in the northern side niche of the Śaiva temples of Orissa, which took place in the initial part of the Somavaṁśī period, must be put in relation with the religious reform introduced by the Somavaṁśīs into Orissan Śāktism, by virtue of which the peaceful aspect of the Devī, embodied at best by Pārvatī, began to be preferred to her wrathful and warlike aspect, personified, in its most spiritually elevated expression, by Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, the slayer of the buffalo-demon.

In the subsequent Imperial Gaṅga period a new iconographic motif having the figure of Mahiṣamardinī as one of its pivotal elements was introduced in sculptural art with the creation of the so-called Durgā-Mādhava images. These composite cult icons, which were carved for the first time on the walls of the famous Sun temple of Konarak (thirteenth century AD), initially represented Lord Jagannātha, a small Śiva-*liṅga* and Mahiṣamardinī side by side while being worshipped by a king. This class of images, thus, represents the royal worship of goddess Durgā along with Viṣṇu and Śiva, with this reflecting the efforts made by the Gaṅga emperors to amalgamate the three main currents of Hinduism — Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism — into a national form of religion having its all-inclusive expression in the cult of Jagannātha.[55] Following this new religious trend, in the temple of Mādhava at Madhavananda in the Prachi Valley both Mādhava (Viṣṇu) and Durgā were installed as the presiding deities. During the period of reign of the Sūryavaṁśīs (*ca.* AD 1435-1540) this iconographic motif was changed by eliminating the image of a Śiva-*liṅga* depicted in the earlier specimens, with this giving origin to the Durgā-Mādhava worship proper. The Sūryavaṁśīs and their dynastic successors, the Bhois of Khurda (who reigned as the feudatories of the Muslim rulers of Orissa), had among their official emblems the image of Jagannātha accompanied by that of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā. Shrines at which the two deities were worshipped together are found in different royal palaces in Puri district. The cult of Durgā-Mādhava was connected with Oriyā nationalism and militarism, which found a symbolic synthesis in the idealised union of the divine powers respectively embodied by the Devī and Jagannātha, the two royal tutelary deities of Orissa *par excellence.*[56] The virtual 'Vaiṣṇavisation' of the worship of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, which has been discussed above with reference to the development of the iconography of this deity in the Imperial Gaṅga epoch, was by that time an accomplished fact.

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[53] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *Śilpa Prakāśa: Medieval Orissan Sanskrit Text on Temple Architecture by Rāmacandra Kaulācāra*, Leiden, 1966, p. 93.

[54] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1062.

[55] K.C. Mishra, *The Cult of Jagannātha*, 2nd rev. edn., Calcutta, 1984, p. 115.

The ten-armed clay images of Mahiṣamardinī being annually modelled by the skilful Oriyā artisans on the occasion of the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā* have, therefore, a long history behind them. The ritualistic worship of such images appear to have taken its final shape from the *Durgā-Pūjā* tradition as elaborated in Bengal, but yet the sculptural representation of the Goddess as the slayer of the buffalo-demon, forming the central object of worship during the *Durgā-Pūjā,* and connected from the hoary past with the ritual decapitation of the buffalo (still today performed at some Śākta shrines of Orissa, including that of Virajā at Jajpur), is based on an uninterrupted art tradition which started in this land from at least the Gupta period. The wonderful efflorescence of Tāntric art in medieval Orissa resulted in the carving of numberless images representing in iconic form the ancient myth of Durgā's victory over the *asura* Mahiṣa, some of which can be included among the best specimens of this sculptural type having been ever conceived in India.

It must be finally pointed out that the wide popularity enjoyed till the present days by the Goddess as the slayer of the buffalo-demon has always had, in Orissa as elsewhere in India, a clear social significance. The triumph of Durgā over the demons represented in the eyes of the oppressed mass of low-caste people — the staunchest devotees of the Mahādevī — a promise of liberation from the intolerable conditions of life they were obliged to endure.[57] In regard to Orissa specially, the virtual absorption of the worship of Durgā into the imperialistic ideology of the later medieval Kaliṅgan empire and the subordination of this goddess to Jagannātha, the national cult hero venerated by the ruling classes of the State, did not cause, as it seems, great changes in the poor people's loyalty to the Devī, as is demonstrated by the incredible number of Mahiṣamardinī images that nowadays continue to be actively worshipped in all the villages and popular urban suburbs of the State. The many popular legends of Orissa concerning the desecration of this or that Śākta shrine by

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[56] D.N. Pathy, 'Orissan Painting', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa,* Cuttack, 1993, p. 228.

[57] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.,* pp. 83-4.

Muslim invaders, some of which have a genuine historical basis, are possibly suggestive of the fact that the 'revolutionary' potential of Śakti cult was acknowledged and feared by the Muslim overlords of the coastal plains of Orissa. No scholar will be ever capable to determine how many Śākta temples and cult icons of Orissa were destroyed by the Muslims between AD 1568 — the date of beginning of their rule over the country — and AD 1754, when they ceded the province to the Marāṭhās.

THE BUFFALO AND THE LION

Each Hindu, Jaina or Mahāyāna Buddhist deity is associated in mythology and art with an animal conceived, both on the figurative and the metaphysical plane, as its specific *vāhana* (carrier, vehicle, celestial mount). The *vāhana* of a Hindu deity — which in the sole exceptions represented by some fearful forms of Śiva and of the Devī and by Kubera can be a recumbent human body instead of an animal — is conceived as the symbol of the deity itself. An animal acting as *vāhana* owns some 'magical' characteristics, in that each single example of its species, either living or carved in sculptural form, bears the implicit presence of the deity associated with it. In the realm of Indian sculptural art the *vāhana* of a deity is generally depicted below the latter's pedestal, which is often constituted by a single or double lotus upon which the image of the god or goddess is represented in a seated or standing pose.

In the opinion of H. Zimmer the *vāhana*, meant as an animate divine symbol supporting the anthropomorphic figure of a god or goddess, is an iconic representation of the power and character of the concerned divinity, or an incarnation of the same at an inferior stage and under a different aspect. It acts as a 'determinative' enabling the devotees to know with precision who is the god or goddess carved by the creator of the image. The depiction of the *vāhana* below the pedestal of the deity dissipates any possible ambiguousness as to the latter's identity. Such a treatment of the carved images of divinities may have originated in Mesopotamia in the course of the second millennium BC; from thence, through the medium of trade, it may have reached the Indian sub-continent in the subsequent epochs.[58]

In consideration of the animal 'mount' associated with her in the myths or in sculptural art, goddess Durgā can be alternatively conceived as Mahiṣāsuramardinī (the Slayer-of-the-Buffalo-Demon) or as Siṁhavāhinī (She-Who-Rides-the-Lion). It is true that Mahiṣa, the buffalo-demon forming the central element of the iconography of Mahiṣamardinī, is not properly definable as a *vāhana,* yet the absence of the lion from the earliest sculptures representing this form of the Mahādevī (mainly dating from the Gupta epoch), as well as the literary evidence furnished by some Purāṇic passages, apparently indicate that the iconographic function of the buffalo-demon in ancient times may have been analogous to the typical function of the *vāhana*, which is that of specifying the power and character of the divinity who stands upon or sits astride it. With reference to this point, U.N. Dhal suggests that the *Devī-Māhātmya*'s philosophical appendage known as *Vaikṛtika Rahasya*

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[58] H. Zimmer, *Miti e simboli dell'India*, Milano, 1993, pp. 70-1.

> states that after worshipping the Goddess, the devotee has to attend to the demon, whose body lies in the left side of the Goddess with severed head and *then* [italics mine] to the lion, the carrier of the Goddess in her right side.[59]

This clearly shows that the buffalo was once considered more important than Durgā's 'official' *vāhana*, the lion. In the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, a later medieval Śākta-Tāntric work,

> Lord Śiva is identified with the buffalo-demon and the buffalo as well and is said to have become the carrier of the Goddess, as Her usual carrier, the lion was unable to do so. . . . In regular iconography buffalo is allotted to Yama, the god of death. The carrier and other elements (epithets and attributes) associated with a deity very well stresses the character of the divinity.[60]

This tradition, thus, states that the buffalo, a symbol of death, is more suitable to act as the *vāhana* of the Devī than the lion. In this perspective, the latter would represent only a subordinate element in the overall iconography of Durgā.

If interpreted as the carrier of Durgā, the buffalo appears to correspond to the goddess' dark side, whereas the lion symbolised in all ancient civilizations the solar, igneous and luminous principle of life and knowledge. In India, for instance, the lion became conceptually associated with the Nṛsiṁha incarnation of the 'solar' god Viṣṇu. On the contrary, the figure of the buffalo-demon reminds us of the *asura* who is generally depicted under the Tāntric images of Cāmuṇḍā, Bhairava and some Mahāyāna Buddhist divinities, all of whom were associated with demonic forces and with *vāmācāra* rituals in the medieval religious traditions of Orissa as well as of other parts of India. The buffalo-demon is, therefore, interpretable as an alternative *vāhana* of the Goddess laying stress on her demonic and *tāmasik* nature, which thing the lion, a devaic and *sāttvik* being, cannot do. In this case, buffalo would above all symbolise death — he is also the mythical celestial mount of the god of death, Yama — as well as violence, chaos, danger or any other bad moral quality or form of pollution personified by the male demonic forces associated with Śiva. Buffalo would also symbolise Śiva himself overwhelmed by the power of the Devī, namely, the same theological concept that is expressed by the iconography of Kālī trampling upon Śiva's recumbent body. Yet the buffalo is stated in the above-mentioned Purāṇic myths to be worth being venerated along with the great Goddess, although only in a subordinate position. The mythical and liturgical theme, typical of South-Indian Hinduism, of the union of the Goddess with a buffalo-consort, evidently assimilated to Śiva, is a further offspring of this religious concept.

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[59] U.N. Dhal, *Mahiṣāsura in Art and Thought*, Delhi, 1991, p. 64, n. 13.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

To sum up, when goddess Durgā is represented in the company of the slain Mahiṣāsura, she reveals her *tāmasik* nature in that she shares in the *āsurik* features of her 'mount', who is, nevertheless, virtually deified as a manifestation of Śiva in demonic form. The *Aruṇācala-Māhātmya* section of the *Skanda Purāṇa* contains a Śaivite myth narrating how from the severed head of Mahiṣāsura, cut off by the Devī, a *jyotir-liṅga* (*liṅga* made of light) sprang up. The *Nāgara Khaṇḍa*, contained in the same work, states that Mahiṣāsura, after having been annihilated, was put by the gods under the permanent control of Durgā for all time to come. The gods granted to Durgā that she would be forever worshipped on the earth in fearful form, on the back of the demon, and with a dagger in her hand.[61] The relation between the Goddess and the buffalo as expressed in this mythological episode resembles the cultic association of a Hindu divinity with his/her own *vāhana*, represented in this case by the *asura* Mahiṣa himself.

Of course, from an orthodox Brāhmaṇical viewpoint it was only the lion, and not the buffalo, that acted in all ages as the celestial carrier of the Mahādevī. As far as the Śākta iconography is concerned, the lion almost invariably accompanies the images of Pārvatī, Mahiṣamardinī and Siṁhavāhinī Durgā and is also represented in the most part of the composite Śaiva-Śākta images, such as those of Ardhanārīśvara and Umāmaheśvara, as the symbolic animal associated with the feminine side of the sculpture (the left one).

As the vehicle of the Devī, the lion evokes the defeat of the *asuras* by Durgā, thus, laying stress upon the Goddess' role as the rescuer of humanity from darkness. As the symbol of the divine energies embodied by the great Goddess, who is stated to have been born out of the *tejas* (burning-like divine energy) of all the allied gods in order to annihilate Mahiṣāsura, the lion expresses the heroism and prowess necessary to defeat the *āsurik* forces contrasting with the Hindu *dharma*. Furthermore, the lion can be even taken to represent the heroism and strength required from the *sādhaka* to enter the dangerous path of Śākta-Tāntric religious practices, full of pitfalls for the uninitiated.[62]

A lion sculpture placed on its *vāhana-stambha* (the pillar that supports the image of the celestial mount of the deity enshrined in a Hindu temple) faces the main portal of most of the Śākta shrines lying in Orissa as well as in other parts of India. A Śākta *pīṭha* is always guarded by a stone lion facing its main entrance, just like a Śaivite shrine is faced by a Nandi image, or a Vaiṣṇavite one by a Garuḍa image. As regards Orissa specifically, the practice of erecting a *vāhana-stambha* in front of the main door of the temple is traceable from the Imperial Gaṅga epoch (*ca.* AD 1110-1434).[63] Accordingly, stone lions surmounting *vāhana-stambhas* — a feature found at most of the Śākta shrines of Orissa, be these ancient or modern — appear to be a later medieval development in the overall project of the Kaliṅgan type of Hindu temple.

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[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 52-4.

[62] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. XLIX-L.

[63] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

Goddesses associated with lion were venerated in the ancient Near East. The well-known statuette recovered at Çatal Hüyük in modern Turkey, representing a parturient goddess seated on a throne between two felines (probably two leopards), is datable to *ca.* 5750 BC. The Sumerian goddess Inanna, later on accepted into the Syrian and Babylonian pantheons under the name of Ishtar, rides on the Lioness-of-Time. The car of the Phrygian goddess Cybele, whose cult spread all over the Roman empire, is dragged by lions; Cybele is furthermore termed as Mother of the Mountain, quite the same way as, in the Indian context, Durgā and Pārvatī, similarly associated with lion, are said to be different manifestations of the Goddess of the Mountain (the mythical daughter of the Himālayas). The Egyptian goddess Sekmet has a leonine head, while the most archaic statues of the Greek goddess Aphrodite depict the deity as accompanied by a lion. Sculptural examples of a goddess associated with lion and paired with a god associated with bull (like the Indian Śiva) have been recovered from Anatolia.[64] Throughout the ancient Indo-Mediterranean area of civilization the figure of a great Goddess was, therefore, associated with the symbol of the lion or with those of the leopard and the panther, two other feline species assimilable to the lion.

Brāhmaṇical Hinduism does not put the lion in relation with the Goddess only, but also with Śiva and Viṣṇu. The Śaiva tradition, as attested in the *Varāha Purāṇa*, knows a leonine form of Śiva which the god assumed in his Vīrabhadra incarnation to slay the elephant-demon Nīla.[65] The decorative sculptural element of Orissan temples called *gajasiṁha*, formed by a lion trampling on a crouching elephant, can be related to the Purāṇic myth in question and symbolises even more markedly the victory of divine light over *āsurik* darkness. *Gajasiṁhas* springing forth on corbels inserted in the temple *vimāna* are very frequently met with in the Śaivite shrines of Orissa having been erected from AD 1000 onwards. Again in this connection, there is an Orissan temple, that of Siṁhanātha on the river Mahanadi (*ca.* seventh-eighth centuries AD), which is dedicated to the leonine aspect of both Śiva and Viṣṇu.

The lion's association with Viṣṇu appears more consistent than Śiva's one in that this god has been worshipped from the hoary past in his incarnation as Nṛsiṁha, the Man-Lion. The qualities symbolised by the lion in all ancient cultures — strength, courage, sovereignty, righteousness, morality — were attributed to Viṣṇu through the creation of the myth of the god's descent on earth in Nṛsiṁha *avatāra*. There seems also to exist a mythological liaison between the lion incarnation of Viṣṇu and the lion mount of the Goddess. A Purāṇic tradition relates that the lion crouching at Durgā's feet is no one but Nṛsiṁha himself, who was subdued by Śiva in his terrific Śarabha form (in its turn, partially leonine) because his wrath was threatening the stability of the world. Since then on Nṛsiṁha was compelled to be the vehicle of the Goddess and to serve her in her fight against the *asuras*. This myth emphasises the relation between the Devī's leonine qualities and Viṣṇu's ones, from which the former are stated to have been withdrawn.[66]

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[64] J. Campbell, *et al.*, *I nomi della Dea. Il femminile nella divinitā*, Roma, 1992, pp. 13 and 154-5; N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

[65] T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, I, Madras, 1914, pp. 379-81.

In Indian thought the lion is considered to be an animal full of *śakti* (power) and of rhythmic movement. It represents lordly power (*rājanya*) in general and, more particularly, the lordly power of wild beasts. The image of this animal, expressing a sense of rhythm, is thought to be made up of *prakṛti-māyā-śakti*. Therefore, the lion partakes in the divine essence of the great Goddess, the transforming energy of the universe. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (III.5.1.21-23) states that the goddess Vāc, the rhythmically uttered Word (one of the Vedic archetypes of the composite figure of the Mahādevī of Hinduism), is herself the Lioness, that is, the effective manifestation of the Power-of-the-Lion, in its turn identified with the Supreme Lord, Parameśvara (Śiva).[67]

THE IMAGE OF SIṀHAVĀHINĪ DURGĀ IN ORISSA

In the Śākta iconography of Orissa goddess Durgā, when not represented as Mahiṣamardinī, is generally depicted as seated in *lalitāsana* on a throne with the lion placed below it, apart from a few images in which she is depicted in a standing pose (with or without lion). This mode of sculptural representation of Durgā, in which she is called Siṁhavāhinī (an epithet already occurring in the *Devī-Māhātmya*, composed during the Gupta age),[68] can alternatively stress the peaceful or the warlike nature of the goddess according to the weapons and attributes being held in her hands. In this class of images emphasis is much more laid upon the above-discussed relation between the Goddess and the lion than upon the mythological motif of Durgā's triumph over the *asuras*. Siṁhavāhinī images are met with in Orissan temples much less frequently than Mahiṣamardinī ones; this notwithstanding, the iconographic motif of Durgā mounted on lion made its appearance already in the early developmental phase of Orissan temple art, with this testifying to its antiquity in the Kaliṅga country.

The earliest images of Siṁhavāhinī Durgā in Orissa are respectively found on the *vimānas* of Paraśurāmeśvara temple and of the Vaitāl Deul at Bhubaneswar. The Paraśurāmeśvara example (*fig.* 7), carved on a *caitya*-medallion and dating back to the seventh century AD, represents a four-armed goddess seated on a big lion (which is depicted frontally) and having among her attributes a rosary and a vase. The same attributes, denoting the intrinsically yogic character of the deity, are placed in two of the hands of the four-armed example carved in an upper subsidiary niche of the Vaitāl temple. In the latter relief, dating from the eighth century AD, the goddess, who is haloed, is seated in *padmāsana* (the lotus pose) while the lion, very small in size, looks at her from behind her right leg (*Pl.* XX).

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[66] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 137, note on the Lion.

[67] S. Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, Calcutta, 1946, II, pp. 332-7.

[68] J. Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, New Delhi, reprint 1973, p. 87.

During the Bhauma-kara epoch the image of Siṁhavāhinī Durgā was often installed in a subsidiary structure erected for this specific purpose in the compound of a Śaiva temple. The small Śākta shrines at issue — like those housing the worshipped image of Mahiṣamardinī, which have been previously discussed — were usually built on the north side of the Śaiva temple complexes. Each of the Śaiva temples of Suklesvara in Cuttack district, Paikapada in Koraput district, Siṁhanātha on the Mahanadi and Mukhalingam in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, all dating from a period ranging from the closing part of the seventh to the ninth century AD, includes in its premises a small shrine dedicated to Siṁhavāhinī Durgā, invariably lying north of the main sanctuary.[69] At Siṁhanātha the image of the deity is eight-armed like the one at Suklesvara, while the image at Paikapada, worshipped as Kālī and having its original head replaced by a lion-head, is four-armed.[70] Some loosely placed images of Siṁhavāhinī Durgā lying in the premises of other Śaiva temples of Orissa suggest the past existence there of similar subsidiary cult edifices erected to enshrine them.

Most of the images of Siṁhavāhinī Durgā assigned to the Bhauma period are eight-armed and lay stress on the aspect of the Devī as a war-goddess by depicting her with the same weapons traditionally wielded by Mahiṣamardinī Durgā. The goddess is usually seated on a double lotus cushion (*viśvapadma*) in *lalitāsana*, her right leg pendent, while the lion crouches down below her seat. In most cases, her major right hand displays *varada* (the *mudrā* or hand gesture indicating boon-bestowal) while the other hands hold a sword, disk, trident, shield, stringed-bow, arrow, goad for driving elephants, rosary, bell, conch, and vase (the same weapons used by Durgā to slay the buffalo-demon).[71]

The finest Orissan specimens of this sub-class of Siṁhavāhinī images are to be found at Suklesvara and Khiching. The already cited example at Suklesvara, (*Pl.* XXII) housed in a miniature shrine located in the area of the ruined Śukleśvara Śiva temple (ninth century AD), is a wonderful specimen of Bhauma-kara art; the goddess' body, carved in round forms, is here richly ornamented while her head is crowned by a jewelled tiara and surrounded by a halo. The iconographic features of the Siṁhavāhinī image carved in relief out of a stone slab preserved in the Khiching Museum (tenth century AD, *fig.* 8) are very similar to those of the specimen from Suklesvara, apart from the fact that the goddess, in this case, wears no tiara, having rather her coiffure arranged in a chignon. A four-armed example of Durgā seated on lion, assignable to about the ninth-tenth centuries AD and holding a rosary, sword, trident and lotus, is presently affixed to one of the outer walls of the temple of Khajūreśvara at Shergarh (Balasore district).

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[69] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1068.

[70] P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report, Vol. I: From 1971 to 1974-75,* Bhubaneswar, s.d., p. 74.

[71] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1069.

A rare type of Siṁhavāhinī image, dating from about the eleventh century AD,[72] is actively worshipped as Caṇḍī in the village of Kaupur in Balasore district, which during the Bhaumakara and Somavaṁśī periods was a flourishing centre of art and religions (Śaivism, Śāktism, Vaiṣṇavism and Sun cult). The image, which is presently worshipped as the *grāma-devatā* of Kaupur, is eight-armed and shows the canonical weapons, attributes and *mudrās* (sword, rosary, shield, trident, bow, a vase, *varada, abhaya*); its peculiarity resides in the fact that Durgā is not shown seated on a lotus cushion with the lion depicted below it, rather she is represented in a standing pose with the lion crouching behind her legs.

Two other nicely carved Siṁhavāhinī images, both dating from the Somavaṁśī period, are noticed in the temples of Bhubaneswar. In the first of them, placed in a miniature shrine to the north of Mukteśvara temple (tenth century AD), the goddess, seated in *padmāsana,* is eight-armed, with most of her attributes, as well as the head, now missing; in the second, carved in a side niche of the temple of Brahmeśvara (eleventh century AD), the goddess, gracefully seated in *lalitāsana,* is four-armed, her head, once again, missing.

To conclude, the Orissan images of Siṁhavāhinī Durgā, though not having such a wide distribution in the State as those of Mahiṣamardinī, count in some of the best specimens of Brāhmaṇical-Tāntric art in the State. The image of Durgā seated on lion appeared at a very early stage of the art development in Orissa and continued to flourish all through the term of the medieval period. The lion, however, is associated in the temple art of Orissa to other goddesses too, such as Pārvatī and Maṅgalā.

Cāmuṇḍā

The all-devouring and blood-thirsty aspect of the Mahādevī, which in Orissa as elsewhere in India was embodied from the later medieval period onwards by goddess Kālī, was expressed in earlier days by the awesome figure of goddess Cāmuṇḍā.

The later Vedic Kālī cannot be taken to be the archetypal model of Cāmuṇḍā, for the former was conceived as but one of the seven tongues of flame with which the god of fire Agni was believed to devour sacrificial oblations.[73] Kālī cult apparently developed in the all-India context much later than Cāmuṇḍā cult. So far as Orissa is concerned, one cannot speak of an institutionalised Śākta cult pivoted upon the figure of Kālī till the fifteenth century AD, when a temple dedicated to Śyāmakālī was erected in the city of Puri. On the contrary, temples dedicated to Cāmuṇḍā are known to have been built in Orissa starting from at least the eighth century AD, the Vaitāl Deul of Bhubaneswar being the earliest surviving example of this class of shrines. Thus, in Orissa at least, it was probably the cult of Cāmuṇḍā that formed the archetypal model of that of Kālī, and not vice versa.

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[72] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1291.

[73] J. Dowson, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

If one really wants to trace a later Vedic antecedent of Cāmuṇḍā and Kālī as well it is the figure of goddess Nirṛti, the dreadful, dark, fierce and mysterious deity of terror and destruction, that must be taken into consideration; nevertheless, it appears more profitable to look for the antecedents of both Kālī and Cāmuṇḍā in the ancient non-Āryan religions, in which the propitiation of female deities or spirits, terrible in appearance and always thirsty for animal or even human blood, was very common. In fact, both Kālī and Cāmuṇḍā are still today very popular among the Austro-Asiatic tribes of India.[74]

ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORSHIP OF CĀMUṆḌĀ

The origin of Cāmuṇḍā is first narrated in the third episode of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, giving account of the Devī's fight with the *asura*s Śumbha and Niśumbha. She is there identified as Kālī (the Black), who sprang forth from the forehead of Ambikā (Durgā) for the sake of destroying an host of demons led by Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, after the killing of whom she was given the epithet of Cāmuṇḍā:

> From the knitted brows of her [i.e., Ambikā's] forehead's surface immediately/Came forth Kālī, with her dreadful face, carrying sword and noose./She carried a strange skull-topped staff, and wore a garland of human heads;/She was shrouded in a tiger skin, and looked utterly gruesome with her emaciated skin,/Her widely gaping mouth, terrifying with its lolling tongue,/With sunken, reddened eyes and a mouth that filled the directions with roars.[75]

This passage describes some of the typical iconographic features of Cāmuṇḍā such as the sword, the noose, the staff topped with a skull, the garland made with human heads, her extremely emaciated aspect, her all-devouring mouth and sunken eyes; the lolling tongue, on the contrary, is a distinctive feature of the later iconography of Kālī rather than of Cāmuṇḍā's one. The fact that Cāmuṇḍā is said to have issued from Durgā's forehead probably means that this deity was conceived as an emanation from intellect (symbolised by the

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[74] B. Bhattacharya, *Śaivism and the Phallic World*, New Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta, 1975, I, pp. 303-4.

[75] *Devī-Māhātmya*, 7.5-7 (translation quoted from T.B. Coburn, *op. cit.*, p. 61).

Mahādevī herself) aiming at destroying the evil forces (symbolised by the *asuras* devoured or decapitated by Cāmuṇḍā).

There is no unanimity of opinions among the scholars as to the origin of the name Cāmuṇḍā as a name of the Goddess, which occurs for the first time in Sanskrit literature in the above-mentioned episode from the *Devī-Māhātmya.*[76] The traditional explanation of this etymology, as provided by the *Devī-Māhātmya,*[77] takes it to be the epithet given by Caṇḍikā (Durgā) to Kālī after the latter had slain the mighty *asuras* Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa and brought their severed heads to her. But N.N. Bhattacharyya opines that, from a grammatical viewpoint, the name Cāmuṇḍā cannot be derived from Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa.[78] Consequently, as suggested by the renowned commentator of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, Bhāskararāya, in the eighteenth century AD, this name is more likely to derive, at least in part, from some regional or non-Sanskritic language.[79] According to B. Bhattacharya,[80] Cāmuṇḍā's name reveals her relation with the Munda peoples (Sanskrit Muṇḍā). As many features of her iconography and cult seem to indicate, she was probably incorporated into the Hindu pantheon as a non-Āryan goddess during the Gupta age with the determinant contribution of the Kāpālikas or of some other left-hand Tāntric sect. Finally, M. Monier-Williams makes Cāmuṇḍā's name derive from that of the equally fearful goddess Carmamuṇḍā, in which case it might have originally signified 'the Widow-Covered-with-an-Animal-Skin' (from the juxtaposition of the Sanskrit terms *carman* = a hide, skin and *muṇḍā* = a widow, shaved-headed female mendicant).[81] If this hypothesis must be accepted, the name Cāmuṇḍā might bear reference to a class of tribal and folk goddesses or female spirits conceived in terrific form as old crones covered with the hide of an animal.

Cāmuṇḍā was conceived by some early medieval Brāhmaṇical-Tāntric schools as the most powerful among the *mātṛkās*, the group of goddesses forming the Śākta counterparts of the main male divinities. She appears in this role, which is attested in all Purāṇic accounts, in the most part of the surviving sets of *mātṛkā* images found in Orissa. Yet, being conceived as the *śakti* of Bhairava (the fearful manifestation of Śiva regarded by some important Tāntric sects as the god's chief epiphany), Cāmuṇḍā was also devoted a cultus of her own in Orissa, where, during the Bhauma-kara epoch, she was often paired with Śiva Bhairava in the temple cult pattern. The Kāpālika and other cognate Tāntric sects, after having gained a great ascendancy on the Oriyās of all castes, were the inspirers of the new religious trend.

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[76] T.B. Coburn, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

[77] *Devī-Māhātmya*, 7.23-25.

[78] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[79] T.B. Coburn, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[80] B. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, I, p. 253.

[81] M. Monier-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 393.

The divine couple Bhairava-Cāmuṇḍā was then being worshipped as the highest and most terrible manifestation of the Absolute, as it is demonstrated by the existence in Orissa of a number of early medieval temples having as their respective presiding deity an image of Cāmuṇḍā or a Śiva-*liṅga* being understood to represent the god in *ugra* form. The Śaiva temples of this type invariably contained at least one image of Cāmuṇḍā, while the Śākta ones invariably contained different images of Śiva in Bhairava form.

Some of the features of the independent cult of Cāmuṇḍā as it historically developed in Orissa during the Bhauma-kara period have been already discussed in chapter 2, so that they need not be repeated here; yet, the most striking among such cultic features, i.e., the sacrifice of human beings in honour of Cāmuṇḍā herself, deserves further explanation in that it appears to have constituted one of the cardinal elements of the great Goddess theology in that period of Orissa's religious history.

It is stated in many ancient texts that, unlike Durgā — the warlike guardian of cosmic order, requiring to be offered with the head and blood of a buffalo once in a year in commemoration of her triumph over the *asura* Mahiṣa —, Cāmuṇḍā demands for sacrifice of blood, either animal or human, independently from her role as the protectress of cosmic order. She needs blood by her own nature, in that she represents destruction, death and hunger. Human sacrifices and self-immolation to Cāmuṇḍā or to other similar Hindu goddesses represent only the extreme aspects of such blood offerings, which were once considered necessary in order to gain the great Goddess' blessing. The skeleton-like, skinny and emaciated aspect of Cāmuṇḍā, her having prominent teeth or fangs, her being associated with corpses, skulls, bones, vultures, jackals, etc., lay emphasis on her ever-hungry and all-consuming nature. The great goddess, of whom Cāmuṇḍā is the crone-form, is the creative energy of the universe: this energy, who is Śakti, is not inexhaustible, for which reason it must be renewed by regularly feeding the great goddess with blood. If the Mahādevī were only to give birth to and nourish her creatures she would soon grew weak and creation would, thus, cease because, as stated in an old Indian saw, 'there is no getting without giving'. Thus, Cāmuṇḍā, Kālī and other similar blood-thirsty forms of the Devī are deputed to receive blood offerings, in past times often under the form of human sacrifices, in order that the world as a living organism, forming the body itself of the Goddess, may continue to exist.[82]

D. Kinsley has so synthesised the aforesaid Śākta religious conception:

> The Mahādevī gives unstintingly. She is indeed life itself. But she must receive back unstintingly too. She is also death itself, which is always necessary to sustain life. . . . Her two facets are clearly interrelated; indeed, each facet demands the existence of the other. In so far as the Devī is this world, she reveals a basic truth that is at the

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[82] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-9.

> very heart of things: namely, that life, metabolism, nourishment necessitate continue massive killing and death. Food that sustains life is only procured through death and killing. Life and death constitute a process of giving and getting, a process through which the energy of the Mahādevī is continuously recycled.[83]

Thus, the practice of sacrificing human beings to goddess Cāmuṇḍā, which, as discussed in detail in the last chapter of the present work, was once widespread over Orissa, must be read in the light of the overall Mahādevī theology, partially sinking its roots in pre-Vedic female-oriented cults, to be understood in the proper way. The thesis according to which the gruesome and bloody cult of Cāmuṇḍā was incorporated into Brāhmaṇical Hinduism from some earlier non-Āryan religion does not imply at all that this cult formed not an essential part of the largely accepted early medieval theological speculations centring round the figure of the Mahādevī.

CĀMUṆḌĀ'S ATTRIBUTES AND WEAPONS

The *Agni* and the *Matsya Purāṇa* state that

> Cāmuṇḍā should be represented as a skeleton in appearance — flesh dried up, bones showing through the skin, eyes sunken an abdomen contracted, with hairs standing on ends and snakes peeping out them. She should be made laughing horribly, with the teeth very prominent and the tongue protruding out. She should have a garland of skulls and bones. She should be dressed in tiger's skin and she should have a corpse or an owl as her vehicle. Her abode should be in a funeral ground under a *vaṭa* (banyan) tree. She should hold behind her the skin of an elephant.[84]

Most of these iconographic prescriptions for carving out Cāmuṇḍā images were applied in Orissa in the period ranging from the eighth to twelfth centuries AD, that is, the phase of strongest Tāntric influence on Orissan religions. Only the tiger's skin and the lolling tongue are generally not present in the Orissan specimens dating from that period. As regards Cāmuṇḍā's association with the *vaṭa* tree (*Ficus indica* or *Ficus bengalensis*, popularly known as banyan), sacred to both Śiva and Kālī as well as to the ancient Buddhists and Jainas, and venerated by some aboriginal communities of Orissa as the 'Mother of the tribe',[85] there is evidence that such an association was very popular in Orissa in by-gone days, as is demonstrated by the fact that, in Orissan villages, Cāmuṇḍā cult icons are often found installed under sacred banyans. It is not known, on the contrary, whether in medieval Orissa an image of Cāmuṇḍā was to be customarily installed in cremation grounds or not.

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[83] *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

[84] B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

[85] V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, London, 1955, p. 207.

As prescribed in the Purāṇas, the Cāmuṇḍā images of Orissa represent the goddess as fleshless and with skin and bones only (*nirmāṁsā* or *kaṅkālī*), as sunken-eyed (*koṭarākṣī*), and as adorned with a garland of skulls (*muṇḍa-mālā*). The number of arms in the images can range from four to eighteen, the weapons brandished by the goddess changing according to this number. The weapons and attributes being most frequently depicted in the goddess' hands are a club made with a human bone topped by a skull (*khaṭvāṅga*), the trident (*triśūla*), the skull-bowl (*kapāla* or *kharpara*), the chopper (*kartṛ*), the sword (*khaḍga*), the drum in form of an hour-glass (*ḍamaru*), the rosary (*akṣamālā*), the bell (*ghaṇṭa*), the battle-axe (*paraśu*), the thunderbolt (*vajra*), the shield (*kheṭaka*), the serpent noose (*nāga-pāśa*); a severed head (*chinnamastaka*) is frequently being held in one of the goddess' left hands, while one of her right hands may display *varada*.[86]

Of the above-listed weapons, the *khaṭvāṅga*, *kapāla*, *khaḍga* and *triśūla* are the traditional weapons wielded by Baṭuka Bhairava (Śiva in youthful and terrific form) in the North-Indian imagery representing this deity;[87] the first two are well-known to have been the most distinctive attributes of the medieval Kāpālika ascetics. Also the *paraśu* and the *ḍamaru* are traditionally associated with the image of Śiva, while the remaining weapons held by Cāmuṇḍā in her Orissan images are generally connected with the iconography of Durgā. A typical feature of these Cāmuṇḍā images is the pose of the left hand, placed near the chin with the little finger inserted into the mouth as if the goddess were biting one of her nails. This hand posture, termed by T.E. Donaldson,[88] with no further explanation, as *carccikā* (Carcikā or Carccikā is one of the traditional epithets of Cāmuṇḍā in Orissa), expresses from the iconographic point of view the goddess' extreme wrath.

The owl, the corpse and the elephant-skin associated with Cāmuṇḍā in her Orissan iconography deserve now to be discussed in detail.

THE EARLY VĀHANA OF THE GODDESS, THE OWL

The *vāhana* (celestial mount) of Cāmuṇḍā in her early images from Orissa is represented by an owl, appearing, for instance, in the example recovered from Bankada in southern Puri district (*ca.* seventh century AD) as well as in the example belonging to the Saptamātṛkā set carved on the north wall of the *jagamohana* of Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Bhubaneswar (seventh century AD), both assigned to the Śailodbhava period. In the subsequent Bhaumakara period, marked for the rapid ascent of Śākta-Tāntric cults in Orissa, the function of representing the goddess' *vāhana* was transferred to a recumbent human body, as it will be expounded below. However, also some later Cāmuṇḍā images show an owl perched on the trident or, alternatively, on the *khaṭvāṅga* brandished by the goddess.

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[86] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1079.

[87] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 466.

[88] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1183.

In the post-Vedic mythology, the owl (*ulūka*) is stated to be sacred to the dark and fearful black goddess Nirṛti, the personification of destruction, terror, desolation, distress, corruption, evil, ruin and old age. Significantly enough, Nirṛti's *vāhana* was represented by a corpse, which has this function also in most of the Cāmuṇḍā images of Orissa.[89] It, therefore, appears probable that the malignant qualities embodied by the later Vedic goddess Nirṛti were attributed in the medieval period to Cāmuṇḍā, the most fearful manifestation of Śakti, through the medium represented by the symbols of the owl and the corpse.

Owl, in Indian culture, is a symbol of terror and death. Along with the jackal and the vulture (two other beasts associated with Cāmuṇḍā in Hindu iconography), the owl is regarded as one of the guardians of the infernal regions, which in the Hindu tradition are often identified with Naraka, one of the mythical sons of Nirṛti.[90] But the valence of the owl as a symbol of terror and death is a religio-cultural feature present all over the world since pre-historic times, as it may be evinced from the following historical and archaeological data.

The great Goddess of life, death and regeneration worshipped in Europe and Anatolia during the Neolithic period was very often represented in the shape of an owl-faced figure having woman's breasts. This archaic Bird Goddess, images of whom have been recovered from Neolithic tombs, was probably conceived as the dispenser of both evil and good like the great Goddess of later Hinduism. Being the Goddess of Fate, she was, in all likelihood, the archetype of the Greek female deity Atropos (the Inflexible, one of the three Fates), to whom the Greek mythology assigned the task to cut the thread symbolising one's life when time had come for that. The representative animal of this goddess was, as one may expect, the owl. Still nowadays in the folk traditions of Europe the owl is regarded as the bird of death.[91]

In Egyptian myths the owl expresses the ideas of cold, night and death; in the hieroglyphic script, it represents the word 'death'.[92] The Latin term *strix*, indicating a night-bird (most likely the owl), is at the origin of the term *striga* (a witch), in that witches were believed by the ancient Mediterranean peoples be able to assume the form of one such animal. The owl is also one of the oldest Chinese symbols. He was regarded as a cruel and inauspicious animal and was believed to devour its own mother.[93] Also in the American continent the owl was anciently put in relation with death: in the tombs of the Chimu culture of Peru, a pre-Incaic one, the image of this night-bird is in fact associated with scenes of blood sacrifice, while in Aztec art it acts as the representative of the god of hell.[94]

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[89] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *Dizionario dell'Induismo*, Roma, 1980, pp. 307 and 459.

[90] *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.

[91] M. Gimbutas, "La 'Venere mostruosa' della preistoria", in J. Campbell, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 43; J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant, *Dizionario dei simboli*, Milano, 1986, I, p. 538.

[92] J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, I, p. 538; M. Gimbutas, *Il linguaggio della Dea. Mito e culto della Dea Madre nell'Europa neolitica*, Milano, 1990, p. 190.

[93] J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 538-9.

Thus, the owl appears to have expressed, in all epochs of human history and all over the world, the idea of the inevitableness of death. In India, it was similarly regarded since prehistoric times as a very ill-omened and inauspicious bird. With specific regard to the non-Āryan cultural traditions of Orissa, it may be mentioned here that the owl figures in many a Bondo, Gadaba, Hill Saora and Kondh legend in connection with death-announcement, epidemics, famines, witches and sorcery, girls of divine origin who got murdered, the unappeased shades of dead ancestors, and so on variously.[95] The early association of goddess Cāmuṇḍā with the symbol of the owl in Orissan sculptural art may have, therefore, derived from the mythology of the non-Āryan tribes that settled in the region in the remote antiquity.

It, therefore, seems that the owl — which, as above stated, was associated by the post-Vedic Āryans to the dreadful goddess Nirṛti — was initially chosen by the Orissan artists as the vehicle of Cāmuṇḍā in view of the fact that this gruesome and awful deity personified, like Nirṛti, the deadly, terrific and black-magic aspect of the female principle. As it was the case in other areas of the Ancient World, so also in the Śākta iconography of Orissa the ideas of terror and death associated with the figure of a great Goddess found expression in the symbol of the owl, probably borrowed by the Brāhmaṇical Hindus from pre-Vedic mythic traditions. In its capacity as Cāmuṇḍā's *vāhana*, the owl symbolises the power of terror and death connatural to this goddess as well as, presumably, the Śākta-Tāntric magic rites that typified her cult in the past.

THE LATER VĀHANA OF THE GODDESS, THE CORPSE

Like the later Vedic Nirṛti and the Brāhmaṇical Hindu deities Bhairava and Kubera, Cāmuṇḍā has a recumbent human body carved on the pedestal of her image. When so depicted, a Hindu deity is termed as *śavārūḍha* (mounted on a corpse). One of the earliest Cāmuṇḍā images presenting this iconographic feature can be seen on a seal recovered from Nalanda in Bihar, which is dated by J.N. Banerjea to the late Gupta period or to the immediately subsequent period.[96]

According to the iconographic canons that were current in Orissa during the Bhaumakara epoch, a corpse invariably acted as the *vāhana* in the specular images of Bhairava and Cāmuṇḍā and — prior to the decline of Buddhism in the country — also in the images of such Tāntric Buddhist goddesses as Kurukullā, Heruka, and some militant forms of Tārā.

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94. *Ibid.*, I, p. 287.

95. E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Madras, 1909, III, p. 404; V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, London, 1954, pp. 290, 304, 322 and 324-5; V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, p. 360.

96. J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-7.

This corpse, which around the eighth century AD replaced in iconography the owl previously functioning as Cāmuṇḍā's *vāhana*, has an esoteric meaning related to Tāntric religiousness; its exact meaning, however, is explained by the scholars by resorting to a different argument every time.

According to V.S. Agrawala,[97] the corpse on which Cāmuṇḍā is seated, or dances victoriously, may represent the matter without *prāṇa* (vital breath), i.e., the principle of darkness, *tāmasik* in nature, that is traditionally embodied by the *asuras*, of whom Cāmuṇḍā is stated in Purāṇic myths to be a ruthless devourer. From this viewpoint, any person who believes in the said principle of darkness and does not strive to elevate his own soul to achieve spiritual illumination, meets his inevitable destiny of destruction and death like the *asura* being trampled on by Cāmuṇḍā.

It appears fruitless trying to give an identity to the demon depicted on the pedestal of the Cāmuṇḍā images, for, as opined by M. Biardeau,[98] this figure is but an equivalent of the *asura* Mahiṣa, killed by Durgā as per the celebrated Śākta myth which is annually revived in India by sacrificing a buffalo to the Goddess during the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā*. The *asura* serving as Cāmuṇḍā's *vāhana* is nameless, quite like the one slain by Durgā (whose epithet, Mahiṣāsura, simply means 'the buffalo-demon'). The two demons have one and the same function, namely, symbolising the *āsurik* and *tāmasik* forces over which the great Goddess is ever triumphant. The circumstance for which an *asura* (demon), either in the case of Mahiṣamardinī and in that of Cāmuṇḍā, acts as the vehicle of the goddess apparently lays stress upon the Devī's relation with the world of the *asuras*, inasmuch as the function of a *vāhana* in Indian sacred art is, as earlier suggested, that of symbolising the power and character of a deity at a lower stage of existence. Once they are interpreted so, the figures of Mahiṣamardinī and Cāmuṇḍā reveal their links with the pre-Vedic religions of India, the main divinities of which were turned by the Vedic Āryans into a class of demonic beings, the *asuras*. It must be pointed out, in this last connection, that the forehead of the *asura* depicted below goddess Cāmuṇḍā in the latter's Orissan imagery is always besmeared with vermilion paste, specially sacred to the Devī. This *asura* seems, thus, to form one entity with the Devī herself.

Again in this context, the recumbent corpse, often being gnawed by a jackal (an animal frequenting funeral grounds), depicted on the pedestal of many Cāmuṇḍā images, can be differently interpreted as an actual dead human body. In this case, as the *vāhana* of the goddess and, therefore, a 'duplicate' of her divine essence, it may also symbolise, in addition to the *āsurik* and *tāmasik* features attributed to the great goddess on the general plane, the practice of human sacrifice, which was one of the constitutive elements of the ritualistic worship of Cāmuṇḍā.[99]

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[97] V.S. Agrawala, *Vāmaṇa Purana — A Study*, Varanasi, 1964, p. 108.

[98] From a correspondence between Prof. M. Biardeau and the present writer.

A more esoteric interpretation of the meaning of the corpse associated with the Cāmuṇḍā image may be furthermore suggested with reference to the secret Kāpālika ritual practice known as *śava-sādhana*, which, as observed in chapter 2, might have been normally performed also at the Vaitāl Deul of Bhubaneswar during the Bhauma-kara period. In this extremely hideous ritual of Tāntric magic, a corpse (*śava*), its head oriented northward, formed the *sādhaka*'s seat; the initiate, while sitting astride it, had to draw a specific *yantra* on this corpse and then utter *japa* with a particular *mantra* and perform a purification rite united with worship on the corpse's head. Corpses are made up of pure matter (*bhūta*), so that they were considered by the Kāpālikas to be free from sins and desires. The deity (Cāmuṇḍā, Bhairava, etc.) evoked by means of the appropriate *mantra* was then believed to materialise itself in the dead human body through the *prāṇa* 'lent' to it by a *vetāla* or a *vetālī*, possibly in accordance with the sex of the selected corpse. At the close of the ritual, if the latter was successful, the corpse's head was stated to turn round and speak to the initiate asking him to make his request to the deity, that was by that time in possession (*āveśa*) of the corpse itself. The *śava-sādhana*, it is understood, was a part of the left-hand Tāntric *vīra-mārga* (the path of heroes); the great terror naturally experienced by a Kāpālika initiate during the performance of this macabre ritual was esteemed to be of great aid in achieving indifference, which is the chief characteristic of any good *yogin*.[100]

It can be tentatively inferred here, that the corpse figuring as the *vāhana* of goddess Cāmuṇḍā in her Orissan imagery might even represent the *preta* (corpse) necessary to perform the ritual of *śava-sādhana*. The fact that the corpse made its appearance in Cāmuṇḍā's iconography only in the course of the eighth century AD may be connected with the penetration of Kāpālika ascetics into Orissa in the same period. The deification of the corpse itself, which is witnessed by the ritual practice, widely observed in Orissa, consisting in smearing with vermilion either the forehead of this recumbent figure and the head of the Cāmuṇḍā trampling upon him, may be, thus, interpreted as a virtual deification of the *vetāla* or *vetālī* (skeleton-like spirits) that, during the performance of the *śava-sādhana* by a Kāpālika ascetic, was believed to reanimate the corpse the latter had to sit astride to perform the ritual in question. It may be added that also in this case, the *vāhana* — exceptionally represented by a dead human body and not, as usual in Hindu iconography, by an animal — appears to express the nature of its associated deity at a lower stage of existence, in that goddess Cāmuṇḍā, otherwise known in early medieval Orissa as Vetālī (in the sense of 'the Lady-of-Spirits'), was regarded by her left-hand Tāntric votaries as the highest personification of the magical powers attributed to the *vetāla*s and *vetālī*s of the Hindu tradition.[101]

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[99] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1078.

[100] Arthur Avalon (*alias* J. Woodroffe), *Il potere del serpente*, Roma, 1968, p. 165, n. 58.

To sum up, the *preta* acting as Cāmuṇḍā's *vāhana* in her medieval imagery, either in Orissa and in the all-India context, seems to express three distinct, but yet interrelated concepts, viz.: (1) the principle of darkness embodied by the *asura*s as well as by their supreme mistress, the Goddess; (2) the sacrifice of human victims, deemed necessary to periodically rescue man from *āsurik* darkness through the grace of the Goddess; (3) the faculty, attributed to the great Goddess through the medium of the spirits to her subordinated, of reviving the dead, both in the spiritual and material sense. The obscure and the luminous side of the Devī, and also her power to bestow both life and death, are apparently synthesised in the iconographic association of Cāmuṇḍā with a recumbent human body (which, it is to be noticed here, in most sculptural examples does not actually appear to be dead, showing, on the contrary, at least some gleam of life, or in other cases even a pious attitude).

A comparison between the early medieval iconography of goddess Cāmuṇḍā trampling on her *preta-vāhana* and the later medieval iconography of goddess Kālī trampling on the apparently dead body of her consort Śiva (Śava-Śiva) shows many similarities between the two iconographic types. In Orissa as in other parts of India the iconography of Cāmuṇḍā seems to have formed the archetype of that of Kālī. The inert *asura* or *puruṣa* lying recumbent under Cāmuṇḍā's foot resembles very much the figure of Śava-Śiva as depicted in the image of Kālī. In this connection, it must be once again recalled here that also the *asura* Mahiṣa, slain by goddess Durgā, is stated in some Purāṇic traditions to be but an *āsurik* form of Śiva. The ancient mythological motif of Mahiṣamardinī's or Cāmuṇḍā's victory over the *asura*s seems, therefore, to have evolved, following the development of Śākta-Tantrism, into the motif of Kālī dominating the motionless body of an *āsurik* Śiva.

In Orissa, a possible evidence of this developmental line is represented by such Cāmuṇḍā images as those of Deogan (Mayurbhanj district) and Bhimpur (Baleswar district). The image at Deogan shows the goddess seated on a double lotus cushion directly issuing from the navel of the apparently dead male body placed below her, whereas the image (now no more *in situ*) that was once installed at Bhimpur shows the *preta-vāhana* of the goddess wearing a crown on his head.[102] In both cases, the figure of an *asura* or *puruṣa* placed below the image of the goddess appears to have been deified. Such a feature possibly announces the later medieval iconography of Kālī trampling upon the motionless recumbent body of her consort Śiva.

THE ELEPHANT-SKIN SPREAD OVER THE GODDESS' HEAD

In a considerable number of Cāmuṇḍā images of Orissa dating from the Bhauma epoch onwards the goddess is depicted with the hide of an elephant, its legs and head hanging loosely, stretched behind her near the top edge of the sculpture's backslab. Some sculptural representations of Cāmuṇḍā holding the two ends of the elephant's skin with her upper pair of hands — a feature that, nevertheless, is not present in the Orissan examples, in which the goddess normally does not touch the elephant-skin with her hands –- are also preserved in the Museums of Dacca and Rajsahi in Bangladesh.[103]

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[101] Orally from Prof. G.G. Filippi.

[102] N.N. Vasu, *The Archaeological Survey of Mayūrbhañja*, Delhi, reprint 1981, pp. LXVI-LXX.

This iconographic feature of Cāmuṇḍā is attested in some early Purāṇas such as the *Matsya, Agni* and *Viṣṇudharmottara* as well as in the *Aṁśumadbhedāgama*; yet, in the even more ancient Tamil epic known as *Śilappadikāram*, the elephant-skin is attributed to Durgā, who is said in that text to cover herself with it, rather than to Cāmuṇḍā. The elephant-skin worn as a macabre trophy by Durgā may symbolise the slaying of the gigantic *asura* Durga, son of Ruru, by the Goddess. It is, in fact, stated that the *asura* Durga, in her fierce combat with the Devī, assumed the form of an elephant.[104]

The motif of the hide of a skinned elephant used as the outer covering of a divinity is principally associated in Hindu mythology and iconography with the *ugra* form of Śiva depicted in the Gajāsura-saṁhāra-mūrti (image of the destruction of the elephant-demon). It is attested in the *Kūrma Purāṇa* that Śiva killed an elephant-demon who was disturbing the *ṛṣi*s of Banaras, engaged in meditation around the *liṅga* known as Kṛttivāseśvara, by suddenly coming out from the *liṅga* itself; after having killed him, the triumphant god covered himself with the skin of the elephant-demon.[105] Another myth, contained in the *Varāha Purāṇa*, narrates that Vīrabhadra (a terrific manifestation of Śiva), having assumed a lion-shape, killed the elephant-demon Nīla and donated the latter's skin to Śiva in full-form, who covered himself with it and, so equipped, subsequently engaged in battle with the *asura* Andhaka and defeated him with the help of a band formed by eight *mātṛkā*s, created by all the gods allied for this specific purpose.[106]

The Śaiva myths at issue, elaborated in fully developed form by the compilers of the Purāṇas, probably drew their inspiration from an epithet used in the Veda to indicate Rudra-Śiva, Kṛttivāsa, a term meaning 'He-Who-has-the-Hide of-an-Animal-as-His-Garment'. This appellation, by the way, is also referred to Śiva in the above-mentioned *Kūrma Purāṇa*'s narrative of the destruction of the elephant-demon. This hardly sketched Vedic mythic nucleus later on developed into the elaborate story of Śiva killing the elephant-demon, which gave rise to the iconic representation of the god shown while covering himself with a spread-out elephant-skin streaming with blood. Gajāsura-saṁhāra-mūrtis were prevalently carved in southern India. The god is depicted in this class of Śaiva images as performing a vigorous and fierce dance of victory over the head of the freshly slain elephant-demon; a portion of the latter's hide is being kept stretched by Śiva over his head while Pārvatī, apparently frightened by the fearsome appearance of her consort, is depicted in the lower right corner of the sculpture.[107]

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[103] B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-4.

[104] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 60; B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 198; R.K. Mishra, 'Sakti Cult in Orissa — An Iconographic Overview', in K.C. Mishra, T. Mishra and R.K. Mishra, eds., *Studies in Saktism*, Bhubaneswar, 1995, p. 151.

[105] T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, II, Madras, 1916, pp. 149-50.

[106] Id., *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, I, pp. 379-81.

In the Tāntric tradition the elephant represents the strength, firmness and solidity of the earth. The figure of the elephant Airāvata, Indra's celestial mount, is placed at the centre of the *mūlādhāra-cakra* (the lowest plexus of man's subtle body according to the mystic physiology of the Tantras), regarded as the seat of the earth element (*pṛthivī-tattva*) and of the dormant vital energy symbolised by the serpent goddess Kuṇḍalinī. In the graphic diagram of this *cakra*, the elephant is surmounted by an upside-down triangle representing the *yoni* of the great Goddess, that is, the matrix of the universe.[108] More generally speaking, in Indian thought the elephant stands for heaviness and darkness. Elephant is, in fact, a *tāmasik* animal symbolising the lowest strata of consciousness, the ones attached to pure matter (i.e., to the earth). It also symbolises the forces preventing one's soul to rise above contingencies and to achieve spiritual illumination. Like the mythical serpent-demon Vṛtra, who was cut to pieces by the god Indra, the elephant, with its all-enveloping and dark-coloured skin, personifies all what prevents the divine manifestation to unfold all of its potentialities (it must be recalled, in this connection, that both the serpent and the elephant are called *nāga* in the *Ṛgveda* and in other ancient texts). That is why the mythgiving account of the killing and subsequent skinning of Gajāsura by Śiva can be considered a Purāṇic re-elaboration of the Indra-Vṛtra myth; in this perspective, the unfolding of the hide of the elephant-demon by Śiva, who raises it over his head like a bleeding mantle, would signify the unfolding of a new cosmic manifestation by the great god after he has triumphed over the principle of constriction, personified as an elephant-demon. Such a conception appears to have been modelled on the analogous exploit of Indra being narrated in the myth of the dismemberment of Vṛtra's body.

With this at the background, the iconographic association of goddess Cāmuṇḍā with an elephant-skin, found in a number of medieval sculptures scattered all over the territory of Orissa, can be read in the proper light. Besides recalling the end of the *asura* Durga at Durgā's hand at the time when the former manifested himself in the form of an elephant, the attribution of an elephant-skin to Cāmuṇḍā appears to be a Tāntricisation, having originated within the Śākta fold, of the Śiva-Gajāsura myth. According to the tenets of Śākta-

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[107] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 486-7.

[108] Arthur Avalon (*alias* J. Woodroffe), *op. cit.*, pp. 96-8.

Tantrism, indeed, it is the Devī, and not Śiva, who is deputed to annihilate the *asuras* inasmuch as it is she, and only she, who embodies the active energy of her consort. All the religious meanings implied by the killing of Gajāsura by Śiva were, thus, transferred, in the Śākta context, to Cāmuṇḍā, the *śakti* of Bhairava (Śiva in his *ugra* aspect).

It must be pointed out that independent images of Śiva killing Gajāsura are extremely rare in Orissa: according to T.E. Donaldson,[109] the only extant specimen of this class of images in the State is found in a niche in the sanctum of the Vaitāl Deul at Bhubaneswar, which is, rather signifcantly as to the point in discussion, a Śākta-Tāntric temple presided over by Cāmuṇḍā. All the other Gajāsura-saṁhāra-mūrtis of Orissa are combined with the Andhakāsura-vadha-mūrti (the image of the killer of the blind-demon) of Śiva so as to form composite icons of a mixed type, which are also found at Ellora, Elephanta and many other sites of North India (but not in South India, where the two iconographic motifs are independent from each other).[110]

The myth of the destruction of the *asura* Andhaka by Śiva is connected in many Purāṇic accounts with the figures of the *mātṛkās*, who helped Śiva to neutralise the blind demon, the personification of darkness. The figure of Cāmuṇḍā in particular seems to be closely connected with the myth in question: the *Vāmana Purāṇa* version of the latter, in fact, relates how, from the sweat having appeared on Śiva's forehead after he pierced Andhaka with his trident and lifted him, still alive, up to the sky, a powerful goddess was born, named Carcikā (one of Cāmuṇḍā's epithets according to the Śākta tradition of Orissa).[111]

The Gajāsura-saṁhāra-mūrti/Andhakāsura-vadha-mūrti composite motif, as typically developed by the early medieval Orissan sculptors, represents Śiva Bhairava while piercing the *asura* Andhaka with his trident and lifting, at the same time, the elephant-skin of the *asura* Gaja over his head with his upper pair of hands. In some examples, the best preserved of which can be seen in the Indian Museum at Calcutta, the emaciated goddess Yogeśvarī is depicted in a squatting pose in the left corner of the sculpture; she holds a *kapāla* with which she collects Andhakāsura's blood drop by drop while Pārvatī remains seated beside her, looking at the scene in terror.[112] Images of this type are also noted at Ellora and Elephanta.[113] Since the iconography of goddess Yogeśvarī, mentioned as one of the *mātṛkās* in some Purāṇic accounts,[114] resembles very much that of Cāmuṇḍā, it appears probable that the depiction of this deity in the class of images at issue was once again meant to lay stress upon the role played by Cāmuṇḍā — replaced in this case by a subsidiary manifestation of hers — in both Andhakāsura's and Gajāsura's destruction at the hand of her 'consort' Bhairava.

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[109] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1108.

[110] C. Sivaramamurti, *India Ceylon Nepal Tibet*, Torino, 1988, Pt. I, p. 62.

[111] V.S. Agrawala, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-7.

[112] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1109.

[113] T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, II, pp. 192-4.

[114] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the depiction of the hide of an elephant on the top portion of the backslab of a large number of Cāmuṇḍā images of Orissa aims at extolling the role of this deity as the active energy (*śakti*) of Śiva Bhairava, being the latter ascribed in some Purāṇic myths with the destruction of an elephant-demon. The elephant-skin spread over Cāmuṇḍā's head also reminds of the role played by the goddess — alone in her Carcikā form or, alternatively, as the most powerful among the *mātṛkās* — in the annihilation of the *asura* Andhaka by Śiva: the latter iconographic motif is, in fact, very often accompanied in North India by the depiction of the hide of the *asura* Gaja being kept stretched by Śiva over his head. Just like the recumbent human body acting as Cāmuṇḍā's vehicle, the elephant-skin generally associated with her Orissan imagery lays stress upon her mythical role as the fiercest and most blood-thirsty form ever assumed by the great goddess in her *avatārik* function as the all-powerful slayer of *asuras*, with all what this implies in the religious perspective of Tantrism. The slaying of an elephant-demon was so closely associated with the iconography of Cāmuṇḍā in Orissa, that by the eleventh century AD the motif of the elephant-skin was completely eliminated from the Andhakāsura-vadha-mūrtis of Śiva, with which it had been previously associated, to be subsequently employed in carving the sole Cāmuṇḍā images.[115]

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ICONOGRAPHY OF CĀMUṆḌĀ IN ORISSA

With this iconologic discussion at the background, it still remains to say of the distribution of Cāmuṇḍā images over Orissa. In the Śākta context of medieval Orissa, an image of Cāmuṇḍā could alternatively belong to a set of *mātṛkās*, be singled out as the solitary presiding deity of a temple dedicated to her only, or also act as *pārśva-devatā* or as *āvaraṇa-devatā* in a temple dedicated to another form of the goddess. In the Śaivite context, on the contrary, the image of Cāmuṇḍā, besides serving as *pārśva-devatā* or as *āvaraṇa-devatā* in some temples, was often installed in a special subsidiary shrine lying north of the main temple. This position in the diagram of sacred space in the Śaiva temple was, as discussed above, also common to the images of Mahiṣamardinī and Siṁhavāhinī Durgā.

Cāmuṇḍā was generally depicted by the medieval Oriyā sculptors in a seated pose, which is in most cases the *ardhaparyaṅka* one, i.e., a pose in which both legs are placed on the seat, one of them being bent under the goddess' body, the other raised with the knee supporting one of the goddess' arms; yet, when Cāmuṇḍā was meant as the member of a *mātṛkā* set, she was often depicted as seated in *lalitāsana* (with one leg hanging from the seat and the other bent under the goddess' body) or, in the earliest examples, in *padmāsana* (with both legs crossed under the body). Images of Cāmuṇḍā in a dancing pose, probably modelled on the iconography of Śiva-Naṭarāja, are not very frequent in Orissa. Finally, the goddess is depicted in a standing pose only in the small Kārttikeśvara temple lying in the premises of the Liṅgarāja temple complex at Bhubaneswar.

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[115] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1109.

As the number and varieties of Cāmuṇḍā images are very elevated in Orissa, being them second in magnitude to Mahiṣamardinī images only, the discussion must be necessarily confined here to the most impressive and well-preserved among them. The depiction of Cāmuṇḍā as an horrific crone with bones, sinews and veins visible through the skin, drooping breasts, shrunken belly, gaping mouth showing teeth or fangs, and round rolling eyes protruding from sunken sockets, is common to most of such Orissan pieces of sculpture.

The earliest specimens of a Cāmuṇḍā image so far discovered in Orissa are the one preserved in the Orissa State Museum, having been recovered from Bankada (the probable ancient capital city of the Śailodbhavas from the sixth century AD) and the one belonging to the Saptamātṛkā set carved on the northern wall of the *jagamohana* of Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Bhubaneswar (*Pl.* XVI and *fig.* 10). Both images, representing Cāmuṇḍā as four-armed and seated in *padmāsana*, have been assigned to the seventh century AD. As already indicated, an owl acts in both examples as the *vāhana* of the goddess; the owl is flanked in either case by two tripods having two vases of offerings (in the Bankada example) or a vase and flowers (in the Bhubaneswar example) respectively placed on them. In either sculptural specimen a skull-medallion has been carved on the goddess' coiffure, while the characteristic garland made with human heads, being possibly a later iconographic development connected with the evolution of Tantrism, is absent. The only visible attribute being held by Cāmuṇḍā in the example from Bankada is a vase, while in the Bhubaneswar example she holds a lily bud, a ball of meal meaning an offering, a trident and a vase. The depiction of tripods with vases on the pedestal of the cult images is a characteristic feature of the early medieval iconography of the *mātṛkā*s in Orissa.

The next developmental stage in the iconography of Cāmuṇḍā in Orissa was achieved in the Bhauma-kara period, during which groups of ascetics affiliated to the extreme Tāntric sect of the Kāpālikas, who worshipped this terrific deity as the chief manifestation of the Mahādevī, gained a tremendous ascendancy in some areas of the State. Most of the surviving Cāmuṇḍā images of Orissa appear to have been carved in that very period under the influence of the Kāpālika religious doctrine. Starting from the eighth century AD the image of Cāmuṇḍā was increasingly raised to the honours of the high altar in the Śākta shrines of Orissa, although, considering the whole range of the Śākta iconography in the Bhauma kingdom, it also continued to be included in the standard *mātṛkā* sets as in the earlier period. The Vaitāl Deul of Bhubaneswar, presided over by a Cāmuṇḍā image surrounded in the sanctum by seven other *mātṛkā* images, provides a good instance of the two-fold function of Cāmuṇḍā, as an individual Tāntric goddess and as one of the *mātṛkā*s.

The image of Cāmuṇḍā in the Vaitāl Deul, belonging to the eighth century AD, presents, probably for the first time in Orissan art, the above-discussed iconographic features typifying the left-hand Tāntric mode of representing this deity. Cāmuṇḍā, indeed, wears here a long garland of skulls, holds *kapāla* and *khaṭvāṅga* among her attributes and, furthermore, has a corpse being gnawed by a jackal depicted on the pedestal instead of her earlier *vāhana* the owl (which is, however, depicted in the lower left corner of the sculpture).[116] The representation, being present here, of the hood of a cobra over Cāmuṇḍā's head may signify her association with Nāga cult, as discussed in chapter 1. On the other hand, a snake is often shown in the Orissan images of Cāmuṇḍā as coiling round the goddess' coiffure or issuing from one of her big circular earrings. The snake passing through the earring also characterises many early medieval images of Śiva to be found in the State (particularly in the syncretistic Śaiva-Śākta icons of Ardhanārīśvara and Umāmaheśvara). Images of snakes are also very commonly found in the Kālī temples of South India, since this reptile is looked on as a favourite of this deity. This may constitute a further evidence of the identification of the figures of Kālī and Cāmuṇḍā, both associated with snakes, as far as their impact on the worshippers is concerned.

Two other terrific Cāmuṇḍā images dating from about the eighth century AD, iconographically very similar to the one enshrined in the Vaitāl Deul,[117] are presently worshipped in the city of Bhubaneswar as Mohinī and Kālī respectively. The image enshrined within the sanctum of Mohinī temple, lying on the south bank of the vast Bindusāgara tank, is ten-armed and depicts the goddess in a dancing-like posture on a *preta-vāhana*; among her attributes, a severed human head is to be noticed. The other image is housed in the small shrine of Kālī located in Temple Road. Moreover, an undated image of Cāmuṇḍā serves as the presiding deity of Citrakāriṇī temple at Bhubaneswar, a monument of the Gaṅga period that was initially conceived as a Śaiva shrine to be later on turned, on an unascertained date, into a Śākta one. To the west of the temple stands a ruined structure dating back, in its present forms, to the Sūryavaṁśī period,[118] which is known as Kapālī *maṭha* (Cāmuṇḍā monastery); the place was, in all likelihood, frequented during the later medieval period by groups of Tāntric ascetics who might have worshipped Cāmuṇḍā as their sectarian deity in the adjoining Citrakāriṇī temple.

At Jajpur, the old capital city of the Orissan kingdom, some Cāmuṇḍā images were acting in the Bhauma-kara period as the common objects of worship of Śākta, Śaiva and

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[116] K.C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, Calcutta, 1961, p. 79; T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1294.

[117] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-3.

[118] D. Mitra, *Bhubaneswar*, 5th edn., New Delhi, 1984, p. 13.

Vajrayāna Buddhist devotees. Three such cult icons, assignable to the eighth-ninth centuries AD, are presently found in the premises of Trilocaneśvara temple, a later Śaiva shrine erected during the Gaṅga period[119] (Pls. IV, V and VI). The first of them, placed at the entrance of the temple compound, appears six- or eight-armed and is engraved with a dedicatory inscription by a certain queen Vatsadevī, probably of the Bhauma dynasty;[120] the second, loosely placed against the *jagamohana* of the temple, depicts the goddess as ten-armed; the third, enshrined in a small subsidiary structure lying in the temple premises, is possibly the sole extant Orissan specimen of an eighteen-armed Cāmuṇḍā. In all these examples the skeleton-like aspect of the goddess is greatly stressed, and her coiffure is arranged in a large chignon of curled-up hair. The *preta-vāhana* is present in each of the three examples, while the elephant-skin is noticed only in the eighteen-armed one.

Another impressive image of Cāmuṇḍā, assigned to the eighth-ninth centuries AD, is enshrined in the premises of Varāhanātha temple at Jajpur, a later cult edifice dating from the Sūryavaṁśī epoch. The image, identified by its present worshippers as a form of Śiva Bhairava, presents the unusual feature of an owl, Cāmuṇḍā's early animal symbol, being perched on the *khaṭvāṅga* wielded by the goddess.[121]

At Khiching, during the period in which the city served as the capital of the Bhañja rulers of Mayurbhanj, a large Cāmuṇḍā image was venerated as the most important manifestation of Śakti in a shrine lying in the premises of the majestic Śaiva temple complex of that town, which is now no longer extant. This Cāmuṇḍā temple must have been a Kāpālika sanctuary. The original cult icon of the goddess, presently enshrined within the sanctum of the reconstructed Kicakeśvarī temple at Khiching, is constantly covered with heavy drapery and is, consequently, not fully inspectionable; this notwithstanding, K.C. Panigrahi opines it to be a creation of the Bhauma-kara art movement, having eight arms.[122]

The region stretching from Khiching to the Bay of Bengal was dotted in the Bhauma-kara and Somavaṁśī periods with Śākta temples dedicated to Cāmuṇḍā. At Badasahi in Mayurbhanj district she was worshipped as Pāśacaṇḍī according to rites that included the sacrifice of human beings. The site consequently became famous as Bali-muṇḍali or Bali-naramuṇḍa, a place-name evidently related to the practice of human sacrifice. The image of Cāmuṇḍā that once served as the presiding deity of the temple in question, erected in the tenth-eleventh centuries by employing the *pīḍha* order but having now totally collapsed, was shifted long ago to Baripada, the later capital of the *mahārājās* of Mayurbhanj, where it is presently worshipped in a small shrine in the old royal palace compound. This very fine and well-preserved piece of sculpture represents Cāmuṇḍā as eight-armed, seated on her *preta-vāhana* with the elephant-skin stretched over her head, a skull-diadem on her flame-like hair and a garland of skulls around her neck.[123]

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[119] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, p. 187.

[120] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

[121] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

[122] K.C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa*, p. 333.

The Cāmuṇḍā image, now broken in pieces, that acted in times gone by as the presiding deity of the collapsed Bhīmeśvarī temple at Pedagadi (Mayurbhanj district), must have been one of the largest of all Cāmuṇḍā images of Orissa. It depicts the goddess as seated on a corpse, having the hide of an elephant stretched over her head, with a panther-skin decorating her right thigh. The excavations conducted at the site, which had been previously merged by the jungle for a long time, have also brought to light two terrifying images of female deities that may have served as the *pārśva-devatā*s of the temple. Each of them is seated on a prostrate *asura* having an animal-face, his hands folded in prayer, and holds *khaṭvāṅga* and *kapāla*, two attributes that suggest the Kāpālika matrix of the images. The temple of Bhīmeśvarī was probably erected in the tenth-eleventh centuries AD.[124] Further in Mayurbhanj district, at Deogan near Mantri we met with another beautiful image of Cāmuṇḍā loosely placed under a banyan tree in the vicinity of a ruined temple dating from *ca.* the twelfth century AD. The example reveals excellent workmanship and is very similar to the representative icon of Kīcakeśvarī of Khiching. Cāmuṇḍā is here eight-armed, garlanded with skulls, and displays the hide of the elephant; a lotus flower, on which the goddess is seated, blossoms from the navel of her *preta-vāhana* while a serpent is carved on either side of the goddess' crown.[125]

A fine old image of Cāmuṇḍā, now unfortunately no more *in situ*, was once under worship as Bhīmā or Kālikā in the sea-village of Bhimpur near Baleswar. This example, reproduced by N.N. Vasu,[126] was eight-armed. The recumbent human body placed below the goddess wore a crown. In addition to the elephant-skin carved above Cāmuṇḍā's head, another elephant-hide was depicted in this example near the head of the *preta-vāhana* of the goddess, which is a quite unique iconographic feature.

A rare three-headed Cāmuṇḍā image presides over Caṇḍī temple at Avana in Baleswar district, built by employing the *khākharā* order (*fig.* 9). The image is worshipped as Brahmāṇī because it is stated to have four heads like Brahmā (the fourth head being represented by the skull-medallion carved on goddess' coiffure). This cult icon, dated to the Bhauma-kara period in consideration of its installation in a *khākharā* type of temple, was perhaps propitiated in by-gone days with human sacrifices. The goddess, who is here eight-armed, holds *khaṭvāṅga* and *kapāla* among her weapons; she shows her teeth in each of her three faces, wears a crown and has her hairdo made up of flame-like curls.[127] The temple of Caṇḍī at Kishorpur in Mayurbhanj district, another half-collapsed *khākharā* shrine located in a rural area near Baripada, has an image of Cāmuṇḍā as its presiding deity. This terrific cult icon, dating from about the tenth-eleventh centuries AD, iconographically resembles the example from Badasahi, which, as above indicated, acted as the presiding deity of Pāśacaṇḍī temple. It represents the goddess as ten-armed, seated on the back of a prostrate human body being eaten by two jackals while being pierced by the goddess' trident; the skin of an elephant is carved above the goddess' head. Cāmuṇḍā's conical hairdo is here minutely decorated with skulls, chopped off palms and a snake. She also holds a severed human head in one of her hands and is adorned with a garland of human heads and with armlets equally made up of miniature human heads.[128]

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[123] N.N. Vasu, *op. cit.*, pp. LXXV-LXXVI; T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1078.

[124] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, pp. 345-6.

[125] N.N. Vasu, *op. cit.*, pp. LXIX-LXX.

[126] *Ibid.*, pp. LXVI-LXIX.

One of the most important areas of Cāmuṇḍā-worship in medieval Orissa was the valley of the Prachi, extending south of Bhubaneswar. The image of Cāmuṇḍā is often found there in the company of that of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā, probably because the two deities, Durgā and Cāmuṇḍā, were mythologically associated since the time of composition of the *Devī-Māhātmya*. May the latter Purāṇic work have constituted the main source of inspiration for the Śākta-Tāntric devotees and artists who inhabited this coastal province of Orissa? Most of the Cāmuṇḍā icons to be found in the Prachi Valley are assigned to the Bhauma-kara and Somavaṁśī periods. All of them appear to have drawn their inspiration from the Kāpālika religiousness, which continued to maintain a heavy hold in the valley even after its decline in the main Śaiva-Śākta pilgrimage centres of coastal Orissa in connection with the end of the Bhauma-kara dynasty and the advent of the Somavaṁśī one (tenth century AD).

Among the many Cāmuṇḍā cult icons being still today ardently venerated in the Prachi Valley, mention can be here made of those of Chaurasi and Chahata, both worshipped as Jāgulei (an epithet derived from the name of the ancient Buddhist serpent-goddess Jāṅgulī, and, thus, emphasising Cāmuṇḍā's aspect as *nāgamātā*); of those of Pitapara and Kapila Muni Ashram, both worshipped as Carcikei (i.e., Carcikā, the Sanskrit name under which Cāmuṇḍā is also worshipped at the Caṇḍī *pīṭha* of Orissa located at Banki on the Mahanadi); of that, associated with ophidic symbols, being now placed in the *jagamohana* of Someśvara temple at Kakatpur (this image was once worshipped as Kālī in a small subsidiary shrine having been recently demolished); of that, installed in an outer niche of Maṅgalā temple at Kakatpur and worshipped as Dakṣiṇa Caṇḍī, before which animals are customarily sacrificed on the *Jhāmu Yātrā* day in the month of Caitra; of that of Niali, worshipped as Caṇḍaghaṇṭā or Haracaṇḍī and stated in an old Orissan legend to represent a manifestation of Pārvatī in her aspect as a terrific *yoginī*, or better as Mohinī.[129]

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[127] H.C. Das, 'Brāhmaṇical Tāntric Art of Orissa', pp. 109-10.

[128] D. Mitra, 'Four Little-Known *Khākharā* Temples of Orissa', *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, vol. II (1960), No. 1, p. 11; T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

In the Somavaṁśī epoch the iconography of Cāmuṇḍā in Orissa underwent but some marginal modifications. The goddess continued to be individually adored in that period as the most fearsome and blood-thirsty manifestation of Śakti, and her image is included in most of the *mātṛkā* sets having been carved in that period. Despite this, her cult was confined by degrees, probably on royal initiative, to some secluded and off-way zones of the kingdom in compliance with the *dakṣiṇācāra*-oriented form of Śāktism introduced by the Somavaṁśīs.

One of the most impressive images of Cāmuṇḍā having been carved in the Somavaṁśī period is presently under worship as Haracaṇḍī in a small modern brick temple lying near Trilocaneśvara Śiva temple at Kundesvara (Cuttack district). This structure was built on the ruins of an earlier temple dedicated to goddess Jāgulei, assigned to *ca.* the eleventh-twelfth centuries AD and probably presided over by the same image. As already observed, the identification of Cāmuṇḍā with the serpent-goddess Jāgulei is a distinctive feature of Orissan Śāktism which possibly originated from the mixed form of religion that prevailed in the country during the Bhauma-kara epoch. Due to Cāmuṇḍā's association with snakes, indeed, a form of cult syncreticism may have developed, which united this deity with the Buddhist serpent-goddess Jāṅgulī (whose name was corrupted by the Oriyās into the form Jāgulei). The serpentine coiffure characterising the Cāmuṇḍā image under discussion may have caused the latter's identification with a form of *nāgamātā*, such as both Jāṅgulī and Jāgulei were. Besides this, the Tāntric nature of this terrific image is stressed by a scene carved on its pedestal, in which two figures holding *kartṛ* and *kapāla* lie by the side of a male, a jackal eating from his hand, who is shown while approaching a buffalo-headed man standing above an emaciated woman; on the right side, an emaciated ascetic watches the scene, whose background is formed by a burning *ghāṭ*.[130]

Two Cāmuṇḍā images dating from the Somavaṁśī period are also carved on the walls of Brahmeśvara temple at Bhubaneswar, erected by the Somavaṁśīs in the eleventh century AD. In either example, the goddess dances upon a prostrate male and has her hair rising upwards like flames. A very badly worn, but yet still impressive image of Cāmuṇḍā is enshrined in a small subsidiary structure lying in the enclosure of Jāleśvara Śiva temple at Kalarahanga near Bhubaneswar, another temple of the Somavaṁśī period[131] (*Pl.* XV).

At Puri and Jajpur some wonderfully carved images of Cāmuṇḍā, belonging to sets of *mātṛkās* assignable to the earlier part of the Somavaṁśī period (second half of the tenth century AD), are to be found.[132] Two images are in Jajpur and one in Puri. The image of Puri, included in the group of Saptamātṛkās enshrined within a small modern structure on the bank of Mārkaṇḍeśvara tank, has a quite awe-inspiring face, like that of an old crone; unlike the images of the other *mātṛkā*s belonging to this set, this Cāmuṇḍā image is always covered with clothes, being the presiding deity of the shrine in question. The two specimens from the city of Jajpur are respectively placed in the Aṣṭamātṛkā temple at Daśāśvamedha *ghāṭ* and in the Sub-Divisional Officer compound, the latter place housing the Vārāhī and Indrāṇī images too, which, with the Cāmuṇḍā image at issue, were most likely part of a set of Aṣṭamātṛkās enshrined in the medieval period in a temple later on destroyed by the Muslims, the old site of which is presently occupied by the assembly terrace known as *mukti-maṇḍapa*. The image at Daśāśvamedha *ghāṭ*, four-armed, holds *kartṛ*, *kapāla*, *śūla* and a severed human head, while that preserved in the Sub-Divisional Officer compound (*Pl.* VIII) has all four arms broken. In both these Cāmuṇḍā images the hair of the goddess stretches upwards like flames while the figure of a prostrate *asura*, carved on the pedestal of either image, displays *añjali-mudrā* (a hand pose closely resembling the act of praying.

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[129] P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report 1974-75: Prachi Valley*, pp. 9, 13, 18, 22-3, 32 and 60-1.

[130] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, pp. 352-3; Id., *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1308.

[131] K.S. Behera, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

An image of Cāmuṇḍā now preserved in the Orissa State Museum, belonging to the incomplete set of *mātṛkā*s recovered from Dharmasala in Cuttack district, can be tentatively assigned to the Somavaṁśī epoch.[133] This image is exquisitely carved but damaged, the only visible objects held by the goddess being a *kapāla* and severed human head. The goddess is seated on a corpse being gnawn by several jackals and has her hair rising from the head like flames and tied at the base with a snake (*Pl.* XIX and *fig.* 11).

Under the Gaṅga rule, marked by the general decline of *vāmācāra* Śāktism, only a few new images of Cāmuṇḍā were carved out in Orissa. The cult of Cāmuṇḍā, in all probability, underwent an irreversible crisis in that very period, after which its place in the heart of the people was taken by the cult of Kālī and the Mahāvidyās, more acceptable by the newly-ascended Vaiṣṇava aristocracy of the Orissan empire. The old cult icons of Cāmuṇḍā and of her consort Bhairava were regarded from that period onwards as the dispensers of welfare to the people, thus, losing their original function, connected with rites of the *vāmācāra* type. The most interesting Cāmuṇḍā image having been carved in Orissa in the Gaṅga epoch is probably the one housed in a small subsidiary shrine located on the Kapilas Hill (Dhenkanal district) beside the main gate of the Candraśekhara temple compound. This cult icon, dating back to the twelfth-thirteenth centuries AD and exquisitely carved in chlorite, is placed beside an image of Bhairava, Cāmuṇḍā's divine consort[134] (*Pl.* XXXI).

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[132] The datation of the images at issue is the one suggested by T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, p. 351.

[133] M.P. Dash, 'Worship of Sapta Mātṛkās and Their Representation in Orissan Temples', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XI, No. 2, p. 121.

[134] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1309.

To conclude the discussion, it must be mentioned that independent cult images of Cāmuṇḍā are very rarely met with in southern Orissa, a four-armed example in a dancing pose to be found in the Pātāleśvara temple compound at Paikapada (Koraput district) being the worthiest noticing among them. In this specimen, a lion is depicted on the pedestal beside the *preta-vāhana*, an unique feature that approximates this image, dated to the ninth century AD, to the iconography of Durgā.[135] Another early Cāmuṇḍā image, eight-armed and associated, in this case, with an owl, is affixed to the *jagamohana* of Bhagavatī temple at Banpur (southern Puri district), while in the premises of the temple of Dakṣa Prajāpati, situated in the same town, a later image of Cāmuṇḍā is venerated in a subsidiary Śākta shrine under the name of Būḍhī Mā (the Old-Mother), an epithet which also occurs in some semi-tribal myths of Orissa.

In Orissa, images of Cāmuṇḍā were also installed and worshipped as *yoginī*s. This is demonstrated by the presence of some images of the goddess in the Sixty-Four Yoginī temples of Hirapur and Ranipur-Jharial. One of the *yoginī*s enshrined in the hypaethral structure at Hirapur resembles very much Cāmuṇḍā in appearance, but can be only tentatively identified with her in that she holds a lion-skin over her head instead of the elephant-skin which is usually depicted on Cāmuṇḍā images and has, moreover, a musk-deer as her *vāhana* instead of an owl or a corpse (*fig.* 31). On the contrary, the broken image of a terrific goddess, larger in size than all other *yoginī*s, which is presently inserted in one of the niches of the Sixty-Four Yoginī temple at Ranipur-Jharial, not only is fully identifiable with Cāmuṇḍā, but even appears to have served in the past as the presiding deity of the shrine itself along with the image of Śiva-Naṭarāja installed in the central pillared *maṇḍapa* of the same, both images being about the same size.[136] In addition to this broken cult icon, at least one more *yoginī* image at Ranipur-Jharial, if not two, are identifiable with Cāmuṇḍā.

The Divine Mothers

The Śaiva-Śākta divinities called *mātṛkā*s seem to have originally represented a class of maleficent goddesses or female spirits unspecified in their number; they were associated with diseases and child-affecting and were consequently propitiated with blood sacrifices. In the historical period each *mātṛkā* or *mātṛ* (divine mother) was associated with a male divinity from the Hindu pantheon so that the number of these goddesses was, somehow artificially, reduced to seven, eight or sixteen units variously according to the different literary sources. The concept about the *mātṛkā*s is similar to that about the *yoginī*s, whose character is very much related to that of the former. Like the *yoginī*s, indeed, none of the *mātṛkā*s is significant by herself or even as the *śakti* of a god, the sole exceptions to this general principle being represented by Cāmuṇḍā and Vārāhī, both of whom enjoyed a cult of their own in Orissa as in many other areas of the Indian sub-continent.[137]

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[135] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, pp. 1310-1; P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report, Vol. I: From 1971 to 1974-75*, p. 73.

[136] H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', p. 111; T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, p. 264.

[137] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

According to the view of N.N. Bhattacharyya, the non-Āryan word *mātṛkā*, the Polynesian equivalent of which is *matariki*, would have designated in ancient times the complex of tribal goddesses worshipped by the Austric speakers from Oceania to India; this term would have been later on adopted into the Indo-Āryan vocabulary to designate the Divine Mothers of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism.[138]

Historically, the number of the *mātṛkās*, even though it was elastic and could vary in accordance with the different Purāṇic traditions, was generally taken to be seven (Saptamātṛkās). In Orissa, the earliest surviving sculptural representation of this group of goddesses, i.e., the Jaina set of *mātṛkās* carved in relief on the back wall of Sātagharā cave on the Khandagiri Hill near Bhubaneswar (assigned to the later Gupta period)[139] and the Brāhmaṇical Hindu one carved on the northern wall of Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Bhubaneswar (seventh century AD), are made up of seven goddesses, with this circumstance indicating that the sacred art tradition of ancient Kaliṅga complied with the view according to which the *mātṛkās* were seven and not more, or less, in number. Also the later Orissan sets of *mātṛkās*, apart from a few significant exceptions, are made up of seven goddesses, for which reason it may be of some utility here trying to give an explanation of this particular number associated with the *mātṛkās*.

THE MĀTṚKĀS AS A GROUP OF SEVEN DEITIES

E. MacKay traces the worship of Saptamātṛkās in India back to the third millennium BC. A famous seal recovered from the Indus Valley, assigned to *ca.* 2000 years before the Christian era, represents, indeed, an arboreal female deity standing in between the wide apart branches of a *pīpal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*, the Sanskrit *aśvattha*, which is the most sacred tree to the Hindus as well as to the Buddhists) while seven human figures, representing in all probability as many female deities or spirits or attendants as indicated by the long plait of hair being displayed by each of them, are depicted below her in a row. These seven female figures, admitted that they do represent deities, may have been the 'ancestresses' of Saptamātṛkās, the Seven Divine Mothers found in the later Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina pantheons.[140]

The sacral valence being conferred in the above-cited seal on the number seven presents some affinity with the motifs of the coeval Egyptian-Mesopotamian culture complex;[141]

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[138] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[139] *Ibid.*, pp. 65-6.

[140] E. MacKay, *The Indus Civilization*, London, 1935, p. 73.

[141] J. Campbell, *Le figure del mito*, Como, 1991, p. 266.

however, in India the number seven has always had a character of special sacredness, being employed to express an indefinite plurality of sacred objects as in the cases of the seven partitions of the world, the seven holy cities, the seven holy rivers, the seven vowels indispensable to utter any *mantra*, the seven seers (*ṛṣis*), and so on. In the Śākta context, besides being conventionally the number of the Divine Mothers or *mātṛkās*, seven is also the number of the deified flaming tongues of Agni, mentioned in Vedic and Upaniṣadic literature as the seven 'Red Sisters', as well as, later on, that of the 'sisters' of the goddess of smallpox and of epidemics in general, Śītalā or Māriyammai.[142]

In the Dravidian countries we find a traditional Śākta cult-pattern based on the veneration of the so-called Seven Sisters, regarded as different manifestations of the village goddess (*grāma-devatā*). These non-Brāhmaṇical female deities, associated with one another at the same place or, alternatively, sharing their tasks among them in different sanctuaries situated in contiguous villages, are worshipped under a large number of local names, generally ending, according to the different languages, with the suffixes *-amma*, *-ambā* or *-ai* (Oriyā *-ei*), i.e., 'mother'. Such suffixes, added to the names of the Seven Sisters (or to those of simple *grāma-devatās*), do not signify at all that the latter are conceived as 'mother goddesses', rather they are used as respectful forms to address these deities, roughly meaning 'Our Lady' (like the word Ṭhākurāṇī in Oriyā); yet, the emphasis laid in South India on the 'motherly' aspect of the Seven Sisters, implied by the epithets used to designate them, makes a comparison between the latter goddesses and the Saptamātṛkās of the Purāṇic tradition possible.[143]

In Orissa, where the non-Brāhmaṇical Dravidian tradition of the Seven Sisters is unknown, the number seven is associated in some aboriginal cultures with the cult of the serpent-goddess Manasā, whose 'sisters', as it is stated by A. Bhattacharya,[144] are worshipped by some tribal communities of the State in the number of five or of seven. In this connection, V. Elwin records the myth of Sambatsap, the Seven Serpent Sisters worshipped by the Kondh Doras of Koraput district.[145] Moreover, there is a popular form of Śakti-worship in Orissa, occurring on the occasion of the so-called *Kānji-amlā* festival in the month of Mārgaśīrṣa (December-January), which consists in the adoration of a tiny image of Ṣaṣṭhī (the Hindu goddess presiding over the destiny of children) placed among seven dry fishes decorated with red or yellow miniature *sārīs*, *kājala* and *sindūra*. These seven fishes are regarded as the incarnations of as many female deities conceived as the 'daughters-in-law' of goddess

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[142] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-1, 270-2, 390-1 and 405.

[143] M. Biardeau, *L'Induismo. Antropologia di una civiltà*, Milano, 1985, pp. 167-8.

[144] A. Bhattacharya quoted in P.K. Maity, *Historical Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasā*, Calcutta, 1966, p. 298.

[145] V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, pp. 296-7.

Ṣaṣṭhī.[146] Since the latter is otherwise known as Skandamātā (the mother of Skanda/ Kārttikeya),[147] a name showing her ancient relation with the *mātṛkās* (who were likewise regarded as the mothers of Kārttikeya and were associated with the destiny of children like Ṣaṣṭhī herself), the worship of seven dry fishes on the occasion of the *Kānji-amlā* festival of Orissa is not unlikely to have originated from the ancient cult of the Seven Divine Mothers.

The number seven is also associated in Orissa with the half-legendary female figures known as the Seven Tāntric Maidens, who may symbolise an entire class of *yoginīs*, witches or sorceresses active in this country during the Bhauma-kara and Somavaṁśī periods, especially along the course of the Mahanadi.

THE MĀTṚKĀS IN THE EPIC TRADITION

To summarise, the *mātṛkās* of the Hindu tradition, particularly when they form a group of seven (Saptamātṛkās), seem to be closely related to the female deities classified since proto-historic times as village goddesses, worshipped throughout the Indian sub-continent by the tribal and low-caste people and regarded as both the bearer of and the rescuer from diseases and natural calamities or perils (e.g., famines, storms, snake bites, and so on). This may be evinced through a study of the earliest references to a group of goddesses collectively known as *mātṛkās*, appearing in a series of episodes from the *Mahābhārata* in which they are mainly associated with Kārttikeya as his nurse-maids or allies.

Indeed, like most of the pre-Āryan female deities — such as village goddesses, *yakṣīs*, *yoginīs*, etc. — the various bands of *mātṛkās* being described in the great epic are all characterised by inauspicious qualities.

> They like flesh, drink strong liquor, and lurk in the confinement chamber (where birth takes place) for the first ten days of a child's life. . . . They have long nails, large teeth, and protruding lips; they inspire their foes with terror; . . . they live in trees, at cross-roads, in caves, on mountains, at springs, in burning grounds. . . . Most references in the *Mahābhārata* to groups of divinities called *mātṛkās* make it clear that these goddesses were understood to be dangerous. Their physical descriptions emphasise their fearsome natures, and their behaviour is consistently said to be violent.[148]

The total number of the *mātṛkās* as described in the epic is indeterminable, with lists of names running into hundreds. Such goddesses are characterised as child-afflicting beings. Their initial task in the *Vana-parva* (215.16-18) is that of killing the infant Kārttikeya — a divine newcomer — by order of Indra, even though, when they approach the child, their breasts ooze milk and they ask him to adopt them as their mothers. The wet-nurse of Kārttikeya, among all the *mātṛkās*, is stated in this myth to be the red-complexioned, wrathful and merciless Daughter of the Ocean of Blood, feeding herself on blood, namely, goddess Kālī (identified, among other things, by her having a trident as her weapon).[149]

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[146] K.B. Das, *A Study of Orissan Folk-lore*, Santiniketan, 1953, pp. 47 and 101.

[147] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

[148] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-3.

According to some scholars, the association of the *mātṛkās* with Kārttikeya in the epic and, later on, their association with Śiva and the Devī in the Purāṇas, would make it clear that they were borrowed by the Brāhmaṇical authors from non-Āryan traditions inasmuch as those gods and goddesses did not originally belong to the Vedic pantheon.[150]

In another episode of the *Vana-parva* (219.22-23) it is Kārttikeya himself who gives the *mātṛkās* the mandate to harm children till the age of sixteen. The *mātṛkās*' dark side as malignant planetary powers — for they are the 'Mothers-of-the-Universe' (*loka-mātṛ*) associated with the Pleiads (Kṛttikās), with the fire god Agni and with the concept about fortune in war related to both the figure of Agni and that of Kārttikeya — is probably hinted at in this mythic narration. The *mātṛkās*, who are here identified with the wives of the six great *ṛṣis*, unjustly accused of having generated Kārttikeya by committing a collective adultery with Agni, furthermore, make themselves clear, that they wish to torment the children of men because they themselves, having been repudiated by their respective husbands, are forever deprived of the possibility to bear children of their own.[151]

Thus, the *mātṛkās* are collectively conceived in the *Mahābhārata* as ill-giving divinities who like in particular to afflict children until they are sixteen years old. Behind this mythic tradition there is most likely

> the belief that women who die childless or in childbirth linger on as inimical spirits who are jealous of other women and their children and whose jealousy is appeased by stealing or harming their children. Worship of the *mātṛkās* is aimed primarily at keeping them away.[152]

Some analogous motifs are also found in the myths explaining the respective origins of the numberless non-Vedic village goddesses of India, including those of tribal and rural Orissa. The Buddhist goddess Hārītī and the Hindu Jyeṣṭhā, Alakṣmī and Śītalā are, furthermore, known to have been originally conceived as ill-giving deities, particularly attracted to small children (especially in the case of Hārītī, whose name means in fact 'the Stealer-of-Children'). These deities were believed to have a fundamentally evil inclination, but yet, if correctly propitiated, they could be turned from the dispensers of mourning and sorrow into the bestowers of salvation and prosperity on children.[153]

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[149] W.D. O'Flaherty, *Miti dell'Induismo*, Parma, 1989, pp. 112 ff.

[150] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

[151] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[152] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

From the cosmogonic viewpoint the *mātṛkās* appear to represent the matrix from which the creation develops, i.e., the metaphysical principle of *prakṛti* (nature), at its initial stage of development, as their collective name, which can be translated either as 'divine mother' or as 'prime cause, origin',[154] may indicate. This primeval and chaotic power, worshipped by the non-Āryan peoples of India since pre-historic times and forming one of the philosophical grounds of the later Sāṁkhya doctrine (having probably originated outside the pale of the Vedic tradition), was equalised to the non-realised aspect of the great Goddess, embodying the primordial energy that gives birth to and sustains the universe. From the metaphysical viewpoint, therefore, the violent and frenzied *mātṛkās* personify primeval chaos at a stage when the latter has not been yet converted to Śakti, the self-conscious divine energy. In the Tāntric tradition Saptamātṛkās stand for the seven vowels, the nuclei of Sanskrit alphabet used to form any *mantra*, while full consciousness is symbolised by the fifty letters of the alphabet as a whole. Thus, the *mātṛkās*, the non-realised 'mothers' who, in Hindu mythology, are denied the faculty to bear children of their own, appear to represent immediate and partial consciousness. This metaphysical category, once the *mātṛkās* were associated with Śiva and transformed into full-fledged *śaktis*, was susceptible of being developed into the source of spiritual liberation and supreme knowledge.[155] In the Tāntric tradition they, in their role as *mantra-mātṛkās*, are regarded as inferior manifestations of Mātṛkā Śakti or Parā Vāc (Supreme Logos), a deified concept that in Orissa, as stated in chapter 2, appears to have been identified in the past with Cāmuṇḍā, the most powerful among the *mātṛkās* themselves who, in this particular aspect of hers, is named Carcikā, namely, Repetition-of-a-Word (when uttering sacred formulae and invocations).

The addition of children, each of them being seated on the lap of his respective 'mother', to the overall iconography of the *mātṛkās* starting from the Kuṣāṇa period (early centuries of the Christian era),[156] does not seem at all to stress the 'motherly' function of these goddesses as the warranters of fertility, rather it might have been meant to express in iconic form the achievement of *brahma-vidyā* (Knowledge-of-the-Absolute, in this case symbolised by a new-born child) through the worship of the Circle of Mothers (which has been discussed in chapter 2). This esoteric, mystic-sapiential meaning of the baby associated with each *mātṛkā* (Cāmuṇḍā excepted) — an iconographic feature that, as far as Orissa is concerned, was popularised in art form under the patronage of the Somavaṁśī monarchs starting from the tenth century AD — is further reinforced by the association of these deities with Śiva Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa, the supreme patrons of knowledge, instruction and letters, which is traced in Orissan sculptural art as early as the seventh century AD and continues unchanged till the close of the Somavaṁśī period.

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[153] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 380-3.

[154] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

[155] A. Schwarz, *Il culto della donna nella tradizione indiana*, Roma and Bari, 1983, pp. 85-6.

[156] B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-1.

THE MĀTṚKĀS IN THE PURĀṆIC TRADITION

The popularity of the *mātṛkās* in the Gupta period is attested by many references to them in literary works and stone inscriptions dated to that period. With their absorption into the Brāhmaṇical religion the *mātṛkās*, who were originally an ill-defined group of goddesses ascribed with a cruel, demonic, ambivalent and unpredictable character, were delimited in number, were given new names corresponding to the feminine forms of those of their newly-given male counterparts, and were generally attributed a more benign character (with the sole exception of Cāmuṇḍā, who continued to represent the terrific aspect of the *mātṛkās* as a whole).

Among the epigraphic sources bearing reference to the cult of the *mātṛkās*, mention can be here made of the Bihar stone inscription of Skandagupta, in which these goddesses are regarded as the mothers or nurses of Kārttikeya (who apparently acts in this case as their guardian) as per the *Mahābhārata* tradition;[157] of the stone inscription of Gangadhar (Madhya Pradesh), dated to the period of reign of Kumāragupta I and mentioning the construction of a Tāntric temple dedicated to the Divine Mothers, which is described as a terrific abode full of *ḍākinīs*, the demoniacal female spirits of the Tāntric and the Hindu folk traditions;[158] of a sixth-century inscription from Udaygiri (Jhansi district, Uttar Pradesh) recording the consecration of a temple to the Mothers;[159] finally, of some inscriptions engraved by the early Cālukyas of the Deccan, in which these monarchs are described as the descendants of the Buddhist goddess Hārītī and as nurtured by the Seven Mothers (whose respective names are, nevertheless, not mentioned in these inscriptions).[160]

Numerous Āgamic texts contain references to early myths centring round the figures of the *mātṛkās*, which were, as a whole, probably recorded in literary form in the course of the Gupta age. Mention can be here made of the Suprabhedāgama, in which seven *mātṛkās* are stated to have been created by Brahmā for the purpose of killing Nirṛta (Misery), the lord of elves (*nairṛta*), ghosts (*bhūta*) and night-wanderers (*rākṣasa*), who was one of the eight Dikpālas (Guardians-of-Directions). This *Āgama* prescribes that Saptamātṛkās should be depicted as holding weapons approximate to those of their male counterparts.[161] The latter iconographic prescription is confirmed by the celebrated sixth-century astronomer Varāhamihira in his work *Bṛhatsaṁhitā*, a most authoritative source as to the description of early Hindu cult icons. The same author, who is silent about the number of the *mātṛkā*s (or *mātṛgaṇa*s, as these deities are called by him), considers them indirectly as forming the main object of devotion of the Śāktas of his time and describes them as the deities to be necessarily propitiated in order to avert evil influences.[162]

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[157] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 363-4.

[158] D.C. Sircar, 'Śakti Cult in Western India', in Id., ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 90-1.

[159] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[160] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 503.

The best known account about the origin of the *mātṛkā*s is given in the third episode of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, where the Goddess multiplies her forms for battle by calling forth the special 'power essence' (*śakti*) of each male deity of the Brāhmaṇical pantheon. From the celestial bodies of Brahmā, Indra and Skanda, the goddesses Brahmāṇī, Aindrī and Kaumārī respectively sprang forth; from that of Viṣṇu (in three different manifestations of his), Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī and Nṛsiṁhī proceeded; from that of Śiva, Maheśvarī was generated. Each of these seven *śakti*s was characterised by the forms, ornaments and mounts of the corresponding male god. An eighth *mātṛkā* came out of the body of the Devī herself: she was the terrible Śivadūtī, 'She-Who-has-Śiva-as-Messenger', whose name hints at the fact, that she sent Śiva himself — here appearing as a subordinate figure — as her messenger to the two overlords of the *asura*s, Śumbha and Niśumbha, with the ultimatum that they should go back to the nether-world along with their armies, otherwise they would be destroyed by the Goddess with the help of her allies the *mātṛkā*s.[163] The other goddess related to Śiva in this narrative is Kālī/Cāmuṇḍā, who, as stated in another passage of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, came out of the Mahādevī's forehead for the sake of killing the great *asura*s Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa. Later on in this textual account, Cāmuṇḍā helps the Goddess to kill the invincible *asura* Raktabīja by drinking — she alone — all of his blood (from each drop of which a new demon was being born every time the *mātṛkā*s tried, without success, to wound Raktabīja to death with their weapons).[164]

Cāmuṇḍā, as it is well-known, is traditionally considered to be the *śakti* of Śiva in his aspect as Bhairava, so that, in this work, she came to be included among the *mātṛkā*s as the third and most powerful of the *śakti*s associated with Śiva in addition to Maheśvarī (also known as Śivānī) and Śivadūtī (also known as Caṇḍikā-*śakti*). In the *Devī-Māhātmya*, therefore, description is given of three *mātṛkā*s directly issuing from Viṣṇu or from some of his incarnations (even though the concept about the sow-goddess Vārāhī seems to have developed in a pre-Vedic context independently from any Vaiṣṇava influence), and of as many *mātṛkā*s being somehow related to Śiva. A further *mātṛkā*, Kaumārī, appears related to the Śaivite pantheon, in that her male counterpart, Kumāra or Kārttikeya or Skanda, is conceived as one of Śiva's sons. The inclusions of Aindrī (or Indrāṇī) and Brahmāṇī (or Brāhmī) among the *mātṛkā*s was seemingly aimed at bridging the gap with the old Vedic pantheon and with the rising concept about the Trimūrti (of which Brahmā was a member along with Viṣṇu and Śiva) respectively. The fact that the *mātṛkā*s are here collectively regarded as the *śakti*s of the members of the supreme Hindu Trinity and their associated male deities (Skanda, Nṛsiṁha, etc.) plus the *śakti* of the most powerful among the old Vedic gods, Indra, constitutes a further indication of their representing the paramount Śakti only when they are taken as a group of 'power essences' issuing from different classes of gods, either 'old' and 'new'. Thus, the *Devī-Māhātmya* account altogether suggests that the *mātṛkā*s, unlike their mistress the Mahādevī, are not entitled to represent absolute consciousness as individual deities or even as the consorts of their associated male divinities. The only exceptions to this principle were represented by Cāmuṇḍā and Vārāhī, who in many areas of India, Orissa included, enjoyed a cultus of their own all through the term of the medieval period.

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[161] T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, I, p. 383; A. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, New York, 1964, pp. 137-8.

[162] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-1 and 504; D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

[163] *Devī-Māhātmya*, 8.11-27.

[164] *Ibid.*, 7.1-23 and 8.39-62.

When operating and worshipped as a group, however, the *mātṛkā*s embody the combined powers of all gods; each of them, in the *Devī-Māhātmya* account, is for the first time asserted to be a portion of the immense potency of the great Goddess and to be more essential and fundamental in the destruction of the evil *asura*s than her respective reference-god. These *śakti*s, meant as the universal powers sustaining all cosmic events and human experiences, are, indeed, identical with the great Goddess; thus, when the latter, being defied by the *asura* Śumbha to struggle alone against him, absorbs the Divine Mothers into her celestial body, she can well say:

> I alone exist here in the world; what second, other than I, is there? / O wicked one, behold these my manifestations of power entering back into me![165]

The process of Sanskritisation of the indigenous Mātṛkā-cults, which is clearly portrayed in the *Devī-Māhātmya* section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, was continued in the early medieval period with the creation of a number of sectarian Purāṇic myths centring round the war exploits of this band of goddesses. D. Kinsley synthesises the developmental process at issue in the following manner:

> The number and names of the *mātṛkā*s become increasingly standardised in the post-epic period until a more-or-less standard list of seven goddesses begins to become synonymous with the *mātṛkā*s. The appearance of these seven goddesses is quite modified from the *mātṛkā*s of the epic. In the medieval period they are patterned (at

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[165] *Devī-Māhātmya*, 10. 3 (translation quoted from T.B. Coburn, *op. cit.*, p. 71).

> least in appearance) on male deities of the Hindu pantheon. Furthermore, they are usually portrayed in mythology as combating demons who threaten the gods or the stability of the cosmos. Thus, in some ways, the *mātṛkās* seem to have been brāhmaṇised and domesticated.[166]

In the *Vāmana Purāṇa* (30.3-9), seven *mātṛkās* are stated to have been born from different parts of the Devī's body — and accordingly, not from the male gods, after whom they are, however, named — to fight against the *asuras*, chief among whom is Raktabīja.[167] The *Varāha Purāṇa* (27.28-43), on the contrary, connects them with the killing of the *asura* Andhaka by Śiva through a mythic narration which is, at any rate, modelled on the episode of Raktabīja as described in the *Devī-Māhātmya* (see the way in which the *mātṛkās*, created by the gods, drink the blood of the great *asura* to prevent its drops from giving origin to innumerable Andhakas, as it was the case with Raktabīja); eight *mātṛkās*, including their leader Yogeśvarī (a variant form of Cāmuṇḍā, born from the flames having issued from Śiva's mouth), are mentioned in this Purāṇa.[168] A similar narration occurs in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (179.8-90), where about two hundred *mātṛkās* are created by Śiva to combat the *asura* Andhaka; the latter, who had the capacity to duplicate himself from each drop of blood that gushed out of his body as soon he was wounded, was bled to death by the ferocious *mātṛkās* (a mythological motif once again modelled on the Raktabīja episode contained in the *Devī-Māhātmya*).[169]

Thus, the Purāṇa authors tried to modify the fundamentally malevolent nature of the *mātṛkās*, akin to that of the innumerable ill-affecting female spirits or village goddesses venerated by the non-Āryan tribes of India, by associating them with the Devī or with Śiva as their assistants in combating the *asuras*. In both cases, they are conceived as extensions of the Devī — either issuing directly from her body or from the bodies of male divinities — in her *avatārik* role as the preserver of the cosmic order. The fierce, violent and blood-thirsty character of the Divine Mothers is, however, betrayed in all of the above mentioned Purāṇic accounts, with this testifying that the *Mahābhārata* tradition about these female deities still exerted some influence in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. The *Vāmana*, *Varāha* and *Matsya* Purāṇas describe the *mātṛkās* as the suckers of the blood of different *asuras* — Raktabīja, i.e., 'Blood-Germ', the ever multiplying germ of vice, and Andhaka, i.e., 'Blind', the principle of darkness and ignorance — while the *Devī-Māhātmya* (8.62), though assigning to the sole Cāmuṇḍā the task of sucking the blood of Raktabīja, states that, once the latter

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166. D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
167. *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 239, n. 36 and 242, n. 18.
168. R.P. Chanda, 'Exploration in Orissa', *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No. 44 (1930), p. 19.
169. V.S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa — A Study*, Varanasi, 1963, pp. 275-9.

was killed, the Divine Mothers got intoxicated by his blood and danced about the battlefield.[170] The restriction of the number of the *mātṛkās* to seven or eight and their association with as many male counterparts, operated by the Purāṇa authors, appear artificial and arbitrary, even though they are understandable in a religious context dominated by the will of assimilating and Sanskritising the primitive goddess-cults of the non-Āryan origin.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE MĀTṚKĀS IN ORISSA

The above-discussed mythological traditions about the *mātṛkās* may fairly enough explain why this group of female deities was so incredibly popular in Orissa during the early and middle portions of the medieval period. Once established that these deities were the Sanskritised hypostases of the archaic ill-giving and child-affecting goddesses of the tribals and semi-tribals, who anciently inhabited in the greater part of present Orissa too, their rise to a pre-eminent position in the Śaiva-Śākta pantheon as it developed in the latter country in the post-Gupta epoch with the determinant contribution of the Pāśupatas and, later on, of the Kāpālikas appears quite logical.

Generally speaking, the Orissan images of *mātṛkās* conform to the overall iconography of these divinities as described in many literary sources. They are, thus, depicted, in most cases, as either two- or four-armed, in the latter case generally displaying the *abhaya* and *varada* hand-poses (i.e., the *mudrās* respectively indicating protection and boon-bestowal). They are, furthermore, marked for the weapons and attributes of their respective male counterparts as well as by the latter's *vāhanas* — a goose or duck for Brāhmī, a bull for Śivānī, a peacock for Kaumārī, the Garuḍa for Vaiṣṇavī, a buffalo (related to Yama rather than to Varāha) for Vārāhī, an elephant for Indrāṇī, an owl or, later on, a corpse (related to Bhairava) for Cāmuṇḍā. They are invariably seated at ease on pedestals and they are never shown engaged in fighting *asuras*, the sole exceptions to this iconographic mode being represented by an early *mātṛkā* frieze to be found at Someśvara temple at Mukhalingam and by a much later *mātṛkā* set housed within the *jagamohana* of Samaleśvarī temple at Sonepur.[171]

The artists and the temple patronisers of medieval Orissa generally accepted the standard list of seven *mātṛkās* as canonised in most of the Purāṇas, namely; the one formed by Brāhmī-Śivānī-Kaumārī-Vaiṣṇavī-Vārāhī-Indrāṇī-Cāmuṇḍā. Such an alignment of Saptamātṛkās, found at many other sites in India, most likely implies a cosmological meaning: Brāhmī at the beginning would, in fact, represent the principle of creation, Vaiṣṇavī in the middle, that of preservation, and Cāmuṇḍā at the end, that of destruction. Yet there is a number of variants to this mode of alignment, these being suggestive of local influences. At some sites of Orissa the *mātṛkās* form a group of eight (Aṣṭamātṛkās) instead of seven, with this evincing the prevalence there of a different literary tradition. The eighth *mātṛkā* added to the standard set is usually Nṛsiṁhī or, alternatively, a form of Kālī/Cāmuṇḍā (Śivadūtī, Danturā, Caṇḍikā or Dakṣiṇa Kālī variously).[172]

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[170] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

[171] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1071.

As stated in chapter 2, the *mātṛkās* were originally worshipped in the all-India context according to Tāntric rites (the worship of the Circle of Mothers or *mātṛ-maṇḍala*, etc.), which were most likely of the *vāmācāra* type as indicated by many a literary and epigraphic source. Such a ritualistic pattern may have been adopted in Orissa as well, at least during the early medieval period (see the arrangement of the cult images in the sanctum of the Vaitāl Deul, where a set of Aṣṭamātṛkās, presided over by a most terrific Cāmuṇḍā image, is accompanied by some as terrific Bhairava images). Nevertheless, with the rise to power of the Somavaṁśī dynasty in the tenth century AD, this Śākta-Tāntric cult must have been, to a great extent, deprived of its most unorthodox and extreme ritual features to be included into the reformed form of Hinduism promoted by the members of that Śaivite dynasty of Orissa. The process of reversion of Mātṛkā-worship to *dakṣiṇācāra* rites is possibly exemplified in Orissa by the association of the figure of a child to each *mātṛkā* image (Cāmuṇḍā excepted) starting from the tenth century AD. This mode of depicting the *mātṛkās* developed in North India (Mathura area) starting from the Kuṣāṇa period;[173] in course of time, it was adopted in central India, from where, spreading across the Chhatisgarh region (modern south-eastern Madhya Pradesh), which was ruled over since the post-Gupta period by the Early Somavaṁśī or Pāṇḍuvaṁśī dynasty,[174] it asserted itself in Orissa, especially after the Somavaṁśīs took the place of the Bhauma-karas on the throne of Jajpur.[175]

The adoption of the baby-in-the-lap motif, laying stress upon the aspect of the Divine Mothers as benign deities, at so a comparatively late date may suggest that, prior to the tenth century AD, the Orissan form of *mātṛkā*-worship was patterned on some earlier magico-religious tradition having a composite, tribal-Tāntric matrix. The 'mother aspect' of the *mātṛkās* — which, according to most of scholars, would have been emphasised by the introduction of the baby-in-the-lap motif — must have been rather neglected in early medieval Orissa, where the *vāmācāra* form of Śakti cult prevailed for centuries owing to the process of Sanskritisation of female-oriented tribal cults carried on by the Pāśupata and Kāpālika ascetics. This asserted emphasis on the 'mother aspect' of the *mātṛkās*, however, appears to the present writer to be less important than the emphasis laid upon their role as the dispensers of mystic-esoteric knowledge — a function that, as earlier suggested, may also have been symbolised by the baby placed on the lap of each of them. In this connection, it must be pointed out that, in the Tāntric tradition, the aspect of Śiva-Pañcānana (the Five-faced) termed as Sadyojāta (the Suddenly-born or also the New-born), corresponding to the Umāvaktra (Goddess-Face) of Śiva as well as with the north direction (which, as earlier stated, seems to be the distinctive direction of the great Goddess), is associated with the mind (*manas*) as well as with the creative function of the godhead.[176] The new-born child associated with each *mātṛkā*, with his reminding of the concept about the Sadyojāta, might, thus, represent the creative process through which mystic-esoteric knowledge is imparted by Śiva to the Tāntric *sādhaka* through the medium of the female principle or Śakti.

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[172] *Ibid.*, pp. 1074-5.

[173] B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-1.

[174] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

[175] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1072.

It seems, therefore, quite incorrect to consider the *mātṛkā*s with the child in their arms as "the exact counterparts of the 'Virgin and Child' of European art",[177] for each of these deities, like all other Hindu goddesses, is never conceived as an actual mother goddess, that is, as the 'mother' of a divine child or of mankind. Pārvatī, just to make an example, is not regarded at all as the generatrix of Skanda and Gaṇeśa, despite the latter gods are traditionally said to be the sons of Śiva and of the Goddess. It is true that, by the time in which their cult was popularised in its fully developed Brāhmaṇical form by the Somavaṁśīs of Orissa, the *mātṛkā*s had acquired a motherly and nurturing personality, which was expressed in iconography by their association with children; yet, this particular aspect of the *mātṛkā*s is to be probably understood as the iconic representation of their functioning as the 'midwives' of the *sādhaka*'s consciousness in the context of the Tāntric spiritual training performed in order to attain *siddhis*, and not at all as that of their functioning as 'maternal' divinities of fertility, that is, as 'mother goddesses' akin in conception to those worshipped in West Asia, Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean basin in ancient times.

VĪRABHADRA AND GAṆEŚA, THE ASSOCIATES OF THE MĀTṚKĀS

The *mātṛkā*s' functioning as magico-sapiential divinities is, among other things, evinced by their constant iconographic association, in Orissa as in the greater part of India, with the images of Śiva-Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa, the supreme patrons of mystic knowledge, respectively placed at the beginning and at the end of each *mātṛkā* set in the role of the male 'guardians' of these ambivalent female deities. It is stated in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (262.38-39) that an image of Vināyaka (Gaṇeśa), along with one of Lord Vīreśvara (Vīrabhadra) mounted on bull, with head covered with matted locks of hair and holding *vīṇā* (the Indian lute) and trident, should always be placed in front of a set of Divine Mothers.[178] The convention of placing the *mātṛkā* images in between those of Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa is traced back in the all-India context to the Gupta period, and was preceded in the Kuṣāṇa period by the association of each *mātṛkā* with two *āyudha-puruṣas* (the male figures flanking a Divine Mother on either side and displaying *abhaya-mudrā* with their right hand while holding a long spear in their left hand).[179] The earliest Hindu set of Saptamātṛkās to be found in Orissa, namely, the one carved on the external wall of the *jagamohana* of Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Bhubaneswar (seventh century AD), already presents the association of the *mātṛkās* with the figures of Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa, a motif that was continued in Orissan art till the close of the Somavaṁśī period (late eleventh century AD).

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[176] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. L'Induismo recente*, Milano, 1981, p. 262 and n. 26; M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

[177] R.L. Mitra, *The Antiquities of Orissa*, Calcutta, reprint 1961, II, p. 231.

[178] R.P. Chanda, *art. cit.*, pp. 4 and 14.

Vīrabhadra, whose name can be freely translated as 'Benevolent-to-Heroes',[180] perhaps in the sense of a deity who favours Tāntric *sādhakas* (*vīra*), was anciently conceived as a youthful, comely, but at the same time fearful and ferocious emanation of Śiva having been created to destroy Dakṣa's sacrifice, to which Śiva and the Devī had not been invited, and to punish the Vedic gods and sages who were attending it. The *Mahābhārata* (XII. 282-83) states that Vīrabhadra was created by Śiva in order to satisfy his angry consort's desire for revenge, and that he, along with the dreadful goddess Mahākālī or Bhadrakālī, born of the Devī's wrath, destroyed the materials of Dakṣa's sacrifice.[181] This story, pointing out the original relation between the terrific aspect of Śiva and that of the Devī as well as their common opposing the old Vedic religion, may have constituted one of the possible sources of inspiration for the later iconographic association of Vīrabhadra with the *mātṛkās* (who also embody, at least in part, the terrific aspect of the great Goddess).

Although he is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as an all-destroyer, Vīrabhadra, when represented by the medieval Hindu sculptors as the guardian of the *mātṛkās*, is depicted in peaceful aspect, usually while gently playing his *vīṇā*. The latter musical instrument is also iconographically associated with Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess of learning, as well as with the Vīṇādhara-Dakṣiṇāmūrti of Śiva, a benign and graceful Āgamic form of the god in his role as the Master of Music. In his Dakṣiṇa (southern) aspect, Śiva is meant as the supreme master of *yoga*, music and Vedic doctrine, and of sacred knowledge in general. In Hindu thought, knowledge is imagined to come down to our world, symbolically placed to the south, like the rays of light come down from the sun, symbolically placed to the north; this southward flow is, at one time, the way of disintegration too, for which reason the Dakṣiṇāmūrti of Śiva is also considered the presiding deity of death (like Yama, who is, in fact, the ruler of the south direction).[182]

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[179] B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

[180] W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

[181] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

[182] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 465; A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-8.

To summarise, Śiva Vīrabhadra was seemingly chosen for accompanying the *mātṛkās* because of his dual and complementary nature as an all-destroying and as a mystic-sapiential divinity; the latter function is symbolised by the *vīṇā* he generally plays in his representative icons (including many Orissan examples associated with *mātṛkā* sets) in imitation of the Vīṇādhara-Dakṣiṇāmūrti of Śiva and of Sarasvatī. Moreover, the idea of destruction, associated with Vīrabhadra since the days of the *Mahābhārata*, may correspond to the power of death emanating from the Dakṣiṇa aspect of Śiva. The *śakti* being associated in the Tantras with this all-pervading ruler of knowledge and death is Bhairavī,[183] whose conception presents many a similarity with that of the *mātṛkās*, particularly in so far as Cāmuṇḍā is concerned.

The image of Gaṇeśa, associated with most of the *mātṛkā* sets of Orissa along with that of Vīrabhadra in full accordance with the all-India tradition, represents an additional symbol of mystic knowledge. Gaṇeśa is, indeed, the god of wisdom and the patron of letters. As in the case of Vīrabhadra, the association of this deity with the *mātṛkās* was aimed at conferring a sapiential connotation on the ambivalent powers embodied by these goddesses and at neutralising their evil influences.

EARLY SETS OF MĀTṚKĀS IN ORISSA

The numerous sets of Saptamātṛkās (or of Aṣṭamātṛkās) of Orissa can be grouped into two broad classes — earlier and later — according to whether they hold babies in their arms or not. The earlier *mātṛkā* images from Orissa (seventh-ninth centuries AD) are never associated with babies while the later ones (tenth-thirteenth centuries AD) are always associated with babies — a feature having been introduced, as earlier suggested, during the Somavaṁśī period.

The Saptamātṛkā set of Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Bhubaneswar (dating from the seventh century AD) is the earliest one having survived in Orissa. The *mātṛkā* images, accompanied by those of Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa plus those of Lakulīśa, Sūrya and other Hindu deities, are carved in relief on the lowest panel of the *bāḍa* (wall portion of the temple) of the *jagamohana*, which is divided into compartments by decorated pilasters. They are all four-armed except Kaumārī and Indrāṇī, who are two-armed. Brāhmī, who is three-headed (the fourth head, as in the case of Brahmā, being fancied to be on the back of the sculpture), holds *akṣamālā* (a rosary), *vīja-pūraka* (a ball of meal meaning an offering), a *ketakī* flower and a vase. Śivānī holds *akṣamālā*, *vīja-pūraka*, *gadā* (mace) and a trident. Kaumārī holds *vīja-pūraka* and *śakti* (a long javelin also wielded by her male counterpart Kumāra or Kārttikeya) and has her hairdo arranged into *śikhaṇḍaka* (a three-lock coiffure that is also worn by Kārttikeya), a distinctive feature appearing in most of her later Orissan images too. Vaiṣṇavī holds *śaṅkha*, *cakra* and a vase (the fourth hand, broken, possibly wielded *gadā*).

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[183] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, pp. 281-2.

Indrāṇī holds *vajra* (thunderbolt) and a vase. The sow-faced Vārāhī holds a lotus, a fish, *kuṭhāra* (a hatchet) and a vase. Finally, the skeleton-like Cāmuṇḍā holds a lily bud, *vīja-pūraka*, a trident and a vase. The pedestals of the images of Brāhmī, Indrāṇī, Vārāhī and Cāmuṇḍā are respectively embellished by a duck, an elephant, a crouching human figure and an owl, all flanked by tripods, while those of the images of Śivānī, Kaumārī and Vaiṣṇavī are devoid of any carving, although also the *vāhanas* of these goddesses must have been depicted there before the temple was repaired in 1899-1901.[184]

Next in order of chronology may be placed the set of *mātṛkās* carved on the vertical jambs framing the *jagamohana* portal of Siṁhanātha temple, located on an island in the bed of the Mahanadi near the village of Gopinathpur (Cuttack district). The temple, generally assigned to the close of the Śailodbhava period (*ca.* seventh-eighth centuries AD),[185] is dedicated to both Śiva and Viṣṇu's lion (*siṁha*) aspect, despite its enshrining only a *liṅga* in its sanctum. The images of Vīrabhadra, Śivānī, Vaiṣṇavī and Indrāṇī are carved on the left side of the temple doorway while those of Brāhmī, Kaumārī, Vārāhī and Cāmuṇḍā are carved on its right side. The image of Gaṇeśa is here absent. Under many aspects these *mātṛkās* resemble those of Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Bhubaneswar: in fact, Kaumārī and Indrāṇī (with the addition, in this case, of Vārāhī) are also here two-armed, while all the other *mātṛkās* are four-armed. Also the *āyudhas* being held by the *mātṛkās* of Siṁhanātha are very similar to those held by the *mātṛkās* of Paraśurāmeśvara temple; moreover, Vārāhī is here mounted, as in the case of her image found in the Paraśurāmeśvara temple, on a squatting human figure flanked by tripods rather than on her later conventional *vāhana*, the buffalo. Some new iconographic features, related in all evidence to the Kāpālika religiousness, are, however, introduced for the first time in the set of *mātṛkās* under discussion: for instance, Vārāhī holds here a bowl resembling very much a *kapāla* (skull-bowl), while the iconography of Cāmuṇḍā undergoes here great changes with the appearance, for the first time, of the typical left-hand Tāntric attributes and ornaments of this deity (*kartṛ*, *khaṭvāṅga*, the garland of human heads) and the replacement of the owl with a recumbent male corpse in the role of the goddess' *vāhana* (but an owl is, at any rate, depicted here on the top of the *khaṭvāṅga* brandished by Cāmuṇḍā) (*Pl.* III).

The very relevant position assigned to the *mātṛkās* at Siṁhanātha — this is the only case in Orissa in which the images of these goddesses are carved in relief round the doorway of a main temple — may be due to their mythological association with both the lion aspect of Śiva and that of Viṣṇu, to whom the temple in question is dedicated. It is, in fact, stated in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (179.8-90) that the host of *mātṛkās* created by Śiva to defeat the *asura* Andhaka announced, after the battle was over, that they will now proceed to destroy the whole universe, which they actually began to do. Śiva then summoned Nṛsiṁha, Viṣṇu's incarnation as man-lion, who created thirty-two other benign *mātṛkās* and ordered them to subdue the frenzied ones who had been created by Śiva. At the end of the episode Śiva and Viṣṇu become the mentors of the tamed *mātṛkās* and appoint them with the tasks of bringing about the welfare of mankind (especially of children) and of guarding the universe.[186] A similar sectarian myth (Vaiṣṇavite), including the resolutive intervention of Nṛsiṁha to calm down the *mātṛkās*, is also narrated in the *Kūrma Purāṇa*.[187] Another sectarian myth (Śaivite) associates the *mātṛkās* with the Śarabha, the partially leonine form assumed by Śiva to punish and subjugate the frenzied Nṛsiṁha after the latter had killed the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu (a staunch devotee of Śiva). The Śarabha is described as a winged, eight-pawed monster having a lion-face and all the *mātṛkās* on the various parts of his body.[188] According to W.D. O'Flaherty,[189] the Śarabha incarnation of Śiva may have been inspired by the Nṛsiṁha incarnation of Viṣṇu. Thus, one can find in the Purāṇas many a reference to some kind of relation uniting the *mātṛkās* with a lion god, alternatively conceived as a manifestation of Viṣṇu or one of Śiva. These Purāṇic narratives may have inspired the placement of a set of Saptamātṛkās round the main portal of the temple dedicated to Siṁhanātha, the Lord-Lion anciently venerated in Orissa.

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[184] K.C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, pp. 71-2.

[185] C.L. Fabri, *History of the Art of Orissa*, Bombay (etc.), 1974, p. 131; K.C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa*, p. 377. T.E. Donaldson, on the contrary, assigns this temple to the late ninth century AD: see *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, p. 166.

Starting from the initial part of the Bhauma epoch there is evidence enough that the *mātṛkās* were being adored in central Orissa according to *vāmācāra* Tāntric rites. As already indicated, the *mātṛkā* images enshrined within the sanctum of the Vaitāl Deul at Bhubaneswar, erected in about AD 775,[190] were the object of worship of the Kāpālikas, who had gained by that time the support of the Bhauma rulers. The actual presiding deity of the shrine, Cāmuṇḍā (whose image is larger than the ones representing the other *mātṛkās*), was probably customarily offered human victims as a sacrifice, yet it is not known which other magical and esoteric rites were being performed within the dark and awe-inspiring sanctum of this Śākta-Tāntric temple in honour of the *mātṛkās* and their associated Bhairavas. The vases, tripods and incense burners being variously carved on the pedestal of each of these sculptures,[191] which also appear in the earliest Orissan specimens of a *mātṛkā* set, suggest, on the whole, the idea of an intense sacrificial activity directed to propitiating the *mātṛkās*.

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[186] V.S. Agrawala, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-9; D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-9.

[187] T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *op. cit.*, pp. 381-2.

[188] A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 137, note on the Lion; M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

[189] W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, p. 208, n. 21.

[190] K.C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, p. 60.

[191] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

The *mātṛkā* set of the Vaitāl Deul is important inasmuch as it appears to be the only set of Aṣṭamātṛkās having survived in Orissa. Besides the usual series of seven goddesses, respectively preceded and followed by Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa, an eighth goddess image is in fact placed in the temple sanctum in between the image of Cāmuṇḍā and that of Gaṇeśa. K.C. Panigrahi has tentatively identified this goddess, holding respectively a Śaivite trident and a lily flower (or, perhaps, a lotus) in her two hands, with Śivadūtī, figuring as one of the *mātṛkās* in the *Devī-Māhātmya* textual account. Be that as it may, this Śaivite goddess appears closely related to Cāmuṇḍā, the presiding deity of the shrine, on the left side of whom she is placed.[192]

In earlier days there was, in all likelihood, a further shrine in Bhubaneswar, perhaps dating from the Bhauma-kara period, which had as its collective presiding deity a set of *mātṛkās*, seven in total. This Saptamātṛkā temple was noticed by M.M. Ganguly next to the main gate of Liṅgarāja temple,[193] but must have totally collapsed in the course of the present century, since no trace of its past existence has come to us.

In the course of the Bhauma period Mātṛkā cult spread over the dominions of the Early Gaṅga kings of northern Andhra Pradesh, bordering on the Bhauma-kara kingdom to the south. This is testified by the presence of a set of Saptamātṛkās in the compound of Madhukeśvara temple at Mukhalingam, a village that, at the time of the construction of this temple, served most likely as the capital of the Gaṅga dynasty. The nicely carved images of *mātṛkās*, who have a gentle expression on their face and are accompanied by the sole Gaṇeśa, adorn the door jambs and lintel of a *khākharā* shrine lying north of the main temple. They have been assigned, like the main temple itself, to the ninth century AD.[194]

Starting from the ninth century AD the *mātṛkās* were also worshipped by some sections of Śāktas of Orissa along with the *yoginīs*. Some of the *yoginī* images enshrined at Hirapur and Ranipur-Jharial have been, indeed, identified as *mātṛkās* (*figs*. 21, 24, 25 and 31).

LATER SETS OF MĀTṚKĀS IN ORISSA

The second and later Orissan mode of iconographic depiction of the Divine Mothers, in which these goddesses are invariably associated with babies placed on their lap, was most likely promoted by the Early Somavaṁśī monarchs, who under this aspect followed the sculptural art tradition of Chhatisgarh (modern south-eastern Madhya Pradesh), their ancestral homeland.

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[192] *Ibid*., p. 79; T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, pp. 1074-5.

[193] M.M. Ganguly, *Orissa and Her Remains — Ancient and Mediæval* (*District Puri*), Calcutta and London, 1912, p. 371.

[194] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, pp. 141-2 and 149.

In around the ninth-tenth centuries AD, when the Bhauma-kara dynasty was still ruling over coastal Orissa (Utkala), the Early Somavaṁśīs of Dakṣiṇa Kośala built a Saptamātṛkā temple at Belkhandi, an ancient centre of Śaivism allied with Śāktism situated on the course of the river Tel in the present Kalahandi district. The shrine at issue, presently known as Caṇḍī temple, testifies that the Śākta-Tāntric cult of Saptamātṛkās had by that time made its way up into north-western Orissa. The temple is now in a dilapidated condition, for which reason the *mātṛkā* images, along with the ones of Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa, have been removed to the Museum of the nearby city of Bhawanipatna. The *mātṛkās* from this series are seated on their usual mounts with a child placed on the lap. The images are unfortunately all broken and badly weathered, but still now their lower portions with the child visible reveal masterly workmanship.[195] The past popularity of the Saptamātṛkās of Belkhandi as cult heroines is demonstrated by the fact, that in by-gone days a mass slaughter of goats and sheep took annually place in front of their temple on the *Śivarātri* day.[196]

Some *mātṛkā* sets iconographically similar to the one of Belkhandi are found at Ghoral and Ranipur-Jharial, two localities situated in Balangir district. The figures of Saptamātṛkās at Ghoral, rudely carved out of a protruding rock and, consequently, mostly obliterated due to weathering effect, are very large in size. They have babies in their arms and are, as usual, associated with Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa. At Ranipur-Jharial, the greatest Śaiva *tīrtha* of the Dakṣiṇa Kośala region, established in the ninth-tenth centuries by the Somavaṁśī rulers, three sets of Saptamātṛkās are presently found. In two of them, Aja-Ekapāda Bhairava replaces Vīrabhadra in the role as the guardian of the Divine Mothers, the other guardian being, as usual, Gaṇeśa. In the third set, on the contrary, no other deity accompanies the *mātṛkās*. A child is depicted on the lap of each goddess in all the three series except in the last mentioned one, in which only Kaumārī — leaving, of course, out of consideration the 'sterile' Cāmuṇḍā — is represented without child, possibly to lay stress upon her youthful nature.[197]

By the ninth century AD the motif of the *mātṛkās* with the child on the lap had become popular in the present Koraput district too, having historically the largest concentration of tribal population in Orissa. This is evinced by the presence of a set of Saptamātṛkās presenting the new iconographic feature in the premises of the temple of Pātāleśvara at Paikapada (ninth century AD), dedicated by the Early Gaṅga monarchs of Kaliṅga to the god Śiva in his aspect as the Lord of the Underworld. The elegantly proportioned images of the seven goddesses, flanked by Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa, are housed in a small Śākta shrine lying in the premises of this temple.[198]

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[195] *Ibid.*, pp. 208-9.

[196] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Kalahandi District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1980, p. 119.

[197] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1072.

The motif of the *mātṛkās* with the child on the lap was developed in the same period in the Mayurbhanj region (north-eastern Orissa); indeed, three tenth-century images of a Divine Mother holding a baby are to be found at Khiching, the eminent Śaiva-Śākta centre that served as the early capital city of the feudal rulers of the region, the Bhañjas. These images represent Brāhmī, Śivānī and Vaiṣṇavī seated in *lalitāsana* on their respective *vāhanas*. Each of the three deities is richly ornamented and wears *kirīṭa-mukuṭa* (a bejewelled tiara). Like all the other deities carved by the medieval artists of Khiching, they show speciality in workmanship, especially as far as the elegance of modelling and their facial expressions, suggesting a meditative attitude, are concerned. The three images probably belonged to a no longer extant shrine consecrated to the *mātṛkās*, which must have been placed in the compound of the equally no longer extant great Śiva temple of Khiching. Thus, other *mātṛkā* images, at least four, must have been worshipped at Khiching in past times. Prior to the reconstruction of the temples of Khiching, which caused the demolition of some structures built over the latter's remains in a relatively modern epoch, the three surviving *mātṛkā* images at issue were installed in the side niches of the so-called Khandiyā Deul, within the sanctum of which the image of the Ṭhākurāṇī of Khiching, Kīcakeśvarī/Cāmuṇḍā, was once enshrined. They are now preserved in the Khiching Museum[199] (*figs.* 12, 14 and 15).

The stage of artistic maturity as regards the sub-class of images representing the *mātṛkās* in association with babies was achieved in the central plains of Orissa in the heyday of the Somavaṁśī rule (second half of the tenth century AD). Though they were Śaiva, the Somavaṁśīs were the devoted worshippers of the Divine Mothers, to whom they dedicated a number of temples in the very heart of their newly-acquired kingdom of Utkala (coastal Orissa).

At Bhubaneswar, Saptamātṛkās-*cum*-children made their first appearance in the temple of Mukteśvara, where they are carved along with Vīrabhadra in niches opening in the cusped ceiling of the *jagamohana*, shaped in the form of an eight-petalled lotus. Their other associate, Gaṇeśa, is carved on one of the two large relief panels placed at either end of the ceiling, the other being occupied by the image of Kārttikeya. This is the only case in Orissan temple art in which Saptamātṛkās are not only accompanied by Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa, but also by Śiva's son Kārttikeya, who, as above mentioned, is associated with them in some ancient

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198. *Ibid.*; V. Dehejia, *Early Stone Temples of Orissa*, New Delhi (etc.), 1979, pp. 131-3.

199. P. Acharya, *Studies in Orissan History, Archaeology and Archives*, Cuttack, 1969, pp. 329-30; T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, pp. 236-7.

myths contained in the *Mahābhārata*. The cosmological meaning of this *mātṛkā* set, related to the *maṇḍala* concept, has been already discussed in chapter 2; it can just be added here, that the Tāntric philosopher Abhinavagupta, in his work *Dehaṣṭadevatācakrastotra* (eleventh century AD), addresses the Divine Mothers, eight in number, as seated on eight petals of the lotus within the body, corresponding to the eight *cakras* or centres of subtle energy as well as with the eight groups of letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, of which all *mantras* are composed. The *mātṛkās* depicted in the *maṇḍala*-like ceiling of the *jagamohana* of Mukteśvara temple may, thus, symbolise the primordial radiating energies of the universe, at the centre of which is the Absolute, namely, Śiva-Śakti (represented by the crescent moon and full-blown lotus carved at the centre of the ceiling). Perhaps Vīrabhadra replaces here the eighth *mātṛkā* described in the Tantra texts because of the age-old convention according to which the image of this deity had to be represented with those of the *mātṛkās*.[200]

At Puri, the life-size and images of Saptamātṛkās, carved in high relief out of chlorite and accompanied by Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa, are installed in the traditional alignment within a modern structure located on the south-west corner of the large tank of Mārkaṇḍeśvara temple, called Mārkaṇḍeya Sarovara. (*fig.* 13) This Saptamātṛkā set is generally assigned by the scholars to the reign of the Somavaṁśī king Bhīmaratha (*ca.* AD 955-80), who is credited in the *Mādalā Pāñji* (the chronicle of Jagannātha temple at Puri) with the installation of 'seven Sisters' (Sāta Bhauni) on the eastern side of Mārkaṇḍeya tank. This king, mentioned in the text as Bhīmakeśarī, is stated to have been a great worshipper of the Devī.[201] According to R.L. Mitra, who wrote his notes in the late nineteenth century, the *mātṛkā* images of Puri, which were then lying under a holy banyan tree, were eight, and not seven such as they are seen now. The eighth, now disappeared *mātṛkā*, mounted on bull, was identified by that scholar with Caṇḍikā, regarded by him as a benevolent form of Cāmuṇḍā.[202] On this ground, it may be concluded that this set of Divine Mothers originally represented Aṣṭamātṛkās rather than Saptamātṛkās; yet, the eighth *mātṛkā* noticed by R.L. Mitra may have been a later addition to the original series of seven goddesses, since the *Mādalā Pāñji*, as above stated, records the installation of seven, and not of eight 'Sisters'. All of the *mātṛkās* belonging to the Puri set are four-armed and seated in *lalitāsana*. A baby is fully visible only on Brāhmī's, Kaumārī's and Vaiṣṇavī's lap respectively, while the babies held by Śivānī, Vārāhī and Indrāṇī are now broken. The face of each *mātṛkā*, Cāmuṇḍā excepted, is lit up with celestial smile. On the whole, the deities appear lost in meditation, showing a passive, contemplative and somewhat blank expression that makes them look lifeless and hieratic.

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[200] P. Pal, 'The Fifty-One Śākta Pīṭhas', in I.S.Me.O., ed., *Orientalia. Iosephi Tucci memoriae dicata*, Serie Orientale vol. LVI (1988), pp. 1054-5; W. Smith, *The Mukteśvara Temple in Bhubaneswar*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 91-3.

[201] M.P. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 120.

[202] R.L. Mitra, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-2.

A fine set of *mātṛkās* iconographically very similar to the Puri one is presently worshipped at Jajpur — the capital city of Orissa in the time of the Somavaṁśīs — in a modern shrine located at Daśāśvamedha *ghāṭ*, which is bathed by the sacred waters of the river Vaitarani. The series is here formed by the images of Lakṣmī-Nṛsiṁha (replacing the lost image of Brāhmī and locally worshipped as such), Śivānī, Kaumārī, Danturā (an extremely decrepit, revolting and hideous variant form of Cāmuṇḍā), Vaiṣṇavī, Indrāṇī, Vārāhī and Cāmuṇḍā. Thus, the original set was most likely made up of eight *mātṛkās* (Aṣṭamātṛkās), i.e., the usual seven plus Danturā. An image of Gaṇeśa of the same size and of the same material (chlorite schist) of the *mātṛkā* images in question, which is now enshrined in a small temple situated north of the *ghāṭ*, accompanied in all likelihood the ones of the Divine Mothers in times gone by. On the contrary, no image of Śiva-Vīrabhadra is to be found at the site. Due to their resembling on the stylistic ground the Saptamātṛkās of Puri, the *mātṛkā* images at issue, all four-armed, are generally assigned to *ca.* the tenth century AD.[203] The *mātṛkā* set of Daśāśvamedha *ghāṭ* can be considered one of the finest specimens of Tāntric art belonging to the Somavaṁśī period, particularly in so far as the Cāmuṇḍā image is concerned. The goddesses are wonderfully carved in three dimensions and in a life-size, while their faces, lit up by the typical smile, appear less conventional and affected than those of the Puri *mātṛkās*. The pot-bellied children associated with them (except in the case of Cāmuṇḍā) are wonderfully carved. The smiling look displayed by each of the Divine Mothers seems to be directed to the nice child she is supporting with the lower left arm, while the *abhaya* (fear-not) pose of their lower right hand contributes to emphasise the goddesses' protective and benevolent attitude. Yet, the presence of the Cāmuṇḍā and Danturā images in this set counterbalances the sense of serenity emanating from the other *mātṛkās* with a fearful and awe-inspiring note. According to the local tradition, this *mātṛkā* set was once enshrined within a medieval temple situated at Daśāśvamedha *ghāṭ* like the present one. This shrine would have been destroyed, on an undetermined date, by the Muslim invaders of Orissa, who would have subsequently thrown the images of the deities down into the Vaitarani. The recovery of these lost *mātṛkā* images as well as the erection of the modern shed under which they are presently installed is reported by A. Stirling to have been the work of a merchant from Cuttack.[204]

A similar story relating to the iconoclastic fury of the Muslims is also handed down in connection with the other set of *mātṛkās* that was installed at Jajpur by the Somavaṁśī monarchs, namely, the one which was originally enshrined at the place presently known as *mukti-maṇḍapa* (assembly hall of learned brāhmaṇas). A high and large platform with a projection on the front side, flanked on either side by a stairway of stone leading to a collapsed doorway, is probably all what remains of this grandiose medieval temple dedicated to the Divine Mothers. Three colossal images of a *mātṛkā*, representing Cāmuṇḍā, Vārāhī and Indrāṇī respectively, were lying topsy-turvy on a heap of rubbish behind this platform when A. Stirling visited Jajpur in the early ninteenth century. The neglected sculptures were removed in 1866 by the British authorities to the garden of the Sub-Divisional Officer, Jajpur, where they are still today preserved. (*Pls.* VII and VIII) According to the local tradition, these giant-size cult icons were originally worshipped in a temple which stood on the said platform along with those representing Brāhmī, Śivānī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī and Nṛsiṁhī. This latter group of stone images would have been smashed in pieces in AD 1568 by the Muslims of Bengal led by Kālāpahār to make cannon-balls, whereas the images now preserved in the Sub-Divisional Officer compound would have been simply thrown by them down the platform. The same tradition credits Kālāpahār's lieutenant 'Alī Bukhārī, a fanatical Afghan iconoclast whose tomb stands in front of the destroyed temple of the Divine Mothers, with the profanation and demolition of the temple in question.[205] Thus, the *mātṛkā* images anciently enshrined on the present *mukti-maṇḍapa* platform appear to have formed a set of Aṣṭamātṛkās rather than of Saptamātṛkās. This also appears to be the case with the other *mātṛkā* set of Jajpur, i.e., the one of Daśāśvamedha *ghāṭ*. The tradition according to which these deities had to be adored in a group of eight may have been the prevalent one at Jajpur during the Somavaṁśī period.

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[203] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 351; Id., *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1073.

[204] A. Stirling, 'An Account, Geographical, Statistical and Historical of Orissa Proper or Cuttack', *Asiatic Researches*, vol. XV (1825), p. 336.

The *mātṛkā* images preserved in the Sub-Divisional Officer compound, carved in round masses out of chlorite schist, represent the largest such images having been ever found in Orissa. Indrāṇī is seated on her elephant mount, very skilfully carved, and wears a tall *kirīṭa-mukuṭa* and delicately designed drapery and ornaments; all of her original four arms, as well as the child placed on her left knee, are broken. The sow-faced and pot-bellied Vārāhī has her hair rising high on the head in corkscrew-shaped curls and is adorned with magnificent bracelets, bell-bangles and crescent-shaped earrings. She is mounted on buffalo and holds a pot-bellied baby on her lap. Of her original four arms, only the one caressing the child has survived. Cāmuṇḍā, mounted on a life-size male corpse displaying *añjalī-mudrā* as a sign of supplication, has all of her original four arms broken; she is three-eyed and has her flame-like hair brushed back under a fillet formed by a cobra, having a miniature skull as its buckle; she looks like a skeleton without flesh and wears a necklace made with human skulls and ornaments made with human bones. On the stylistic ground, T.E. Donaldson has assigned these three images, as well as the temple that once enshrined them, to the tenth century AD, the golden age of the Somavaṁśīs.[206]

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[205] *Ibid.*, p. 335; C.S. Banurji, 'An Account of the Antiquities of Jajpur in Orissa', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XL (1871), Pt. I, p. 153; W.W. Hunter, 'Orissa under Indian Rule', in N.K. Sahu, ed., *A History of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1956, pp. 111-2; R.P. Chanda, *art. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

[206] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, p. 351.

Another beautiful set of *mātṛkā*s carved out of chlorite schist and associated with children, this too dating back to the Somavaṁśī age, is presently under worship in a newly-built thatched house located in the village of Sathalapura near Alanahat (Cuttack district). The temple which originally contained these *mātṛkā* images along with the ones of Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa has totally collapsed, but yet its groundplan, still discernible at the site, reveals that it belonged to the *khākharā* variety, meant specifically to house the Śākta deities.[207] The series is here formed by the images of Kaumārī, Brāhmī, Śivānī, Vārāhī, Indrāṇī and Vaiṣṇavī in the given order. A seventh *mātṛkā* image, representing Nṛsiṁhī, was described by M.P. Dash,[208] but has now disappeared. Thus, the image of Cāmuṇḍā, curiously enough, is missing from this Saptamātṛkā set, in which it was probably replaced by the no longer extant image of Nṛsiṁhī. At any rate, Nṛsiṁhī replacing Cāmuṇḍā is not unknown in the iconography of the *mātṛkā*s as it historically developed in the all-India context.[209] The *mātṛkā* set at Sathalapura is assigned to the tenth century AD like that at Puri, the iconographic features of which are very similar to the former's ones (although the size of the Puri images is bigger). An unique feature of the ruined Mātṛkā temple of Sathalapura is represented by its being faced by a subsidiary shrine housing a life-size image of Aja-Ekapāda Bhairava, which served in all likelihood as a supplementary 'guardian' of the goddesses in addition to Vīrabhadra and Gaṇeśa. This beautiful Tāntric cult icon, still enshrined at the site within its original sanctuary, is the largest image of Aja-Ekapāda ever found in Orissa. The deity is four-armed and represented *ūrdhvaliṅga.* He stands on a prostrate corpse, is garlanded with skulls and is flanked at the base by attendants holding *kartṛ* and *kapāla*, these features suggesting his Tāntric nature.[210] This, is an excellent representative image bearing the art tradition of the Somavaṁśīs.

The latest noticeable example of a set of *mātṛkā*s having been carved during the Somavaṁśī period is the one, unfortunately mutilated, recovered from the city of Dharmasala in Cuttack district, which is now housed in the Orissa State Museum.[211] The surviving images from this set, carved out of chlorite schist, represent Vaiṣṇavī, Indrāṇī, Vārāhī and Cāmuṇḍā. The richly ornamented and well-preserved goddesses hold babies in their arms (Cāmuṇḍā, as it is the norm, excepted) and appear lost in meditation like the *mātṛkā*s of Puri and Jajpur. All of them are four-armed, although some of their arms are now broken. The weapons and attributes still visible in their hands are *chinnamastaka* and *kapāla* (Cāmuṇḍā), *vajra* and *aṅkuśa* (Indrāṇī), *cakra* and *śaṅkha* (Vaiṣṇavī), *matsya* and *kapāla* (Vārāhī). Vaiṣṇavī and Indrāṇī wear a tall *kirīṭa-mukuṭa* (bejewelled tiara), while Vārāhī has her hairdo arranged in a nimbus of corkscrew-shaped curls and Cāmuṇḍā has her hair rising upwards like flames tied at the base by a snake fillet (*figs*. 11 and 17).

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[207] H.C. Das, 'Brāhmaṇical Tāntric Art of Orissa', p. 124.

[208] M.P. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 121.

[209] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

[210] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

[211] The datation is the one suggested by M.P. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 121.

Other *mātṛkā* sets of the minor artistic relevance assignable to the Somavaṁśī period are to be found at Kalarahanga, Beraboi and Shergarh, while the only extant example of a *mātṛkā* set assignable to the Imperial Gaṅga period is the one, formed by five figures only, which is carved on a stone slab loosely placed in the *jagamohana* of Buddhanātha temple at Garudipanchana near Bhubaneswar.[212]

The age-old Mātṛkā cult appears to have declined all over Orissa after the rise to power of the Imperial Gaṅgas, who do not appear to have patronised this cult. It cannot be ascertained from the historical viewpoint whether the worship of the Divine Mothers continued to be popular in Orissa after the fall of the Somavaṁśī dynasty or not, but it seems, at any rate, certain that after that event no new set of *mātṛkā*s was carved out to be installed as the collective presiding deity of an Orissan Śākta temple.

Vārāhī

The cult of Vārāhī, like that of Cāmuṇḍā, flourished in medieval Orissa as an individual Śākta-Tāntric cult theologically connected with Mātṛkā cult. The worship of the great Goddess in her manifestation as Vārāhī (Sow) was more popular in eastern India than in the other parts of the sub-continent. In Orissa, the sow-headed and pot-bellied goddess Vārāhī presides over or, in other cases, is one of the side deities of a number of medieval Śākta temples.

The concept about a sow-goddess, incorporated in the medieval Śākta-Tāntric doctrines, has in all evidence very little to do with the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu (Varāha), being the former much more related to the female-oriented religiousness of pre-history than to the later theological doctrines of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism. Vārāhī's assimilation to the *śakti* of Viṣṇu in his aspect as Sacrificial Boar, first operated in *Devī-Māhātmya* (composed in the Gupta period),[213] was in all likelihood only the final outcome of a slow process of Sanskritisation that invested the archetypal figure of the Sacred Sow, worshipped in India since pre-Vedic times.

Before giving a description of the temples and iconography of Vārāhī in Orissa, it may be useful to give some hints on the origin and significance of sow-worship in the Neolithic cultures and the ancient civilizations of the Indo-Mediterranean area.

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212. T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1074.

213. *Devī-Māhātmya*, 8.18.

THE NEOLITHIC SOW-GODDESS

In the Neolithic period, after the discovery of agriculture, animal-breeding became a regular economic activity. Boar, by nature a half-sedentary animal, became then by degrees a bred animal of great importance. The fierce wild swine was, thus, changed by man into the more tractable domestic swine, essentially destined to reproduction. A new species of swine, pig or hog, was created out of this process. It is important to note that, while the European pig in course of time became the hairless and pink-skinned beast everyone knows, the Asian pig, the autochthonous species of India, retained most of the somatic characteristics of the boar such as long hair, dark colour, etc., and remained in essence a half-wild animal. Nowadays this type of pig is being bred especially in the Dravidian areas of India, but yet, prior to the Muslim invasions (for the Muslims abominate pigs), it must have been endemic of North India too as an inheritance from Neolithic hoe-farming, which made use of pig's excreta as manure.[214] Thus, pig, such as it was known to the ancient inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent, differed very little from boar. This is of the utmost importance as to the comprehension of the meaning of the Sacred Sow in proto-historic Indian cultures, inasmuch as the supposedly universal Neolithic sow-goddess, from whom the concept about Vārāhī appears to derive, must have shared in the nature of both the wild boar and the half-wild pig, two swine species that were assimilated to each other in the outlook of the ancient inhabitants of India. For this reason Vārāhī, in her intimate essence, personifies not only the sacred spirit of the female of boar, but also that of the female of pig.

J. Voss, a scholar in pre-historic and ancient matriarchal cults, puts forward the hypothesis that the females of the Neolithic, progressively relegated to a subordinate status by the male leaders of the rising patriarchal society, and, thus, deprived of the authority they had enjoyed in the phase of predominance of mother-right, began at a certain time to regard the wild sow as the inner symbol of their ancient freedom and power. The wild sow became a symbol of the primordial nature, savage and strong, of woman, of her vigour and insuperability, and also of her free sexuality, full of desire, but now put under control by the male. The innate superiority of the sow over the he-boar, manifesting itself in the easy way she forms a family group with her little ones without involving the latter's father in any way, was probably reminiscent to Neolithic women of the matriarchal family structure, in which man's role was near to be that of a mere seed-giver.[215]

In several Neolithic cultures the boar in general, irrespective of its sex, was also associated with death and regeneration. This was probably due to the fact that boars, like vultures, feed on carrions. In the Neolithic cultures of the Mediterranean basin, this animal was attributed a magical and supernatural nature, symbolically associated with the ideas of death and rebirth.[216] Also in the mythic traditions of India the Sacred Boar, besides having a cosmogonic function in his manifestation as Emūṣa (mentioned in the *Brāhmaṇas*), later on assimilated to the Varāha *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, is sometimes a symbol of destruction and death. A Śaiva myth recorded in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* gives account of the terrible cosmic ravage caused by the Boar and his sons, who were killed by Śiva in order to restore the upset cosmic order.[217]

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[214] R. Biasutti, *et al.*, *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, 4th edn., Torino, 1967, II, p. 619.

[215] J. Voss, *La luna nera. Il potere della donna e la simbologia del ciclo femminile*, Como, 1996, pp. 75 and 90-1.

Significantly enough, the concept of death is also associated with the Tāntric goddess Vārāhī: the latter's *vāhana* is, in fact, the buffalo, which also serves as the celestial mount of the Hindu god of death Yama. Vārāhī is conceived a sort of Yama's *śakti*, for which reason her image, in the context of the iconography of Saptamātṛkās, is sometimes replaced by that of Yamī (Yama's sister).[218] The association of the great sow-goddess of the Neolithic age with the idea of death, however, appears to be a later religio-cultural development determined by the final victory of patriarchal ideals over matriarchal ones. In this connection, a myth elaborated by the Gadabas of Koraput district, an Austro-Asiatic-speaking tribe of Orissa, narrates of a goddess who gave birth to a multitude of little pigs that immediately started to devour all crops, for which reason her brothers sealed her vulva up, causing her death.[219] The matriarchal sow-goddess, most likely portrayed in this myth, was, thus, perceived, even in a tribal culture such as the Gadaba one, as a dangerous being destined to be suppressed.

It seems, on the whole, that the sow-goddess worshipped in pre-historic times throughout the world, probably from Europe to the Pacific, symbolised not only the freedom and authority anciently enjoyed by woman, but also her uterus, containing the germs of life like an egg, as well as the mystery of her menstrual cycle, regulated by the sacred phases of the moon. The sow-goddess is ever and everywhere conceived as the mythic projection of the cosmic uterus that causes all living beings to be born, die and take rebirth. She was, thus, meant as the 'vase' of eternal transformation, and it is not by chance that she was often represented by Neolithic artisans in the shape of a vase surmounted by the head of a pig. The womb of the Sacred Sow was paralleled with the cosmic womb of the goddess of life, death and regeneration, and represented, by virtue of such an association of symbols, the mythic *locus* of everlasting rebirths of transformation. The Sacred Sow was not a mere symbol of biological fertility as it is still maintained by many scholars — a reductive conception having originated after the triumph of patriarchalism, according to the views of which woman is nothing but a child-bearer — rather she was a symbol of spiritual transformation, connected with the mysteries, magic rites and esoteric knowledge that characterised the female-oriented cults of the pre-patriarchal epoch.[220]

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[216] M. Gimbutas, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-7.

[217] W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, pp. 200 ff.

[218] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

[219] V. Elwin. *op. cit.*, pp. 133-4.

Among the many specimens of iconic representation of the Sacred Sow or of a sow-goddess belonging to the Neolithic period or to the first stages of civilization, the most significant come from the Mediterranean area, being represented by the sow-goddess of Rastu (Rumania), assigned to the last part of the sixth millennium BC and having the lay-out of a labyrinth (an esoteric symbol of transformation) engraved on the abdomen, the sacred pig of Nea Macri (Greece), assigned to *ca.* 6000 BC and probably connected with the worship of a sow-goddess, the statue of a seated and necklaced sow-goddess recovered from Syria and preserved in the Louvre Museum, dated to *ca.* the seventeenth-sixteenth centuries BC, and the wonderful head of a smiling and 'sleeping' hog, probably representing a sow-goddess, recovered from Leskavika in Bulgaria and assigned to *ca.* fifth century BC.[221] In the ancient Mediterranean area of civilization, a sacred pig or sow was associated with a number of goddesses, such as Nut and Isis in Egypt, the great Goddess worshipped in the island of Crete, and Demeter/ Ceres in the Greek-Roman world. A sow-goddess, in this case a she-boar presiding over the process of cosmic transformation, was furthermore venerated by the ancient Celts and Germans.[222]

In view of the above-noted approach, sow appears to have been associated with the female principle — the Śakti of Indian religions — from very ancient times.

ICONOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF VĀRĀHĪ AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

The Tantra literature of India accepts the worship of the universal Śakti in the Sacred Sow, the Vārāhī. According to B. Bhattacharya,[223] the sow-faced Vārāhī, like the lioness-faced Nṛsiṁhī, is a manifestation of the Mahādevī that clearly relates her to such far-away countries as the Near Eastern ones. The assertion appears correct, since sow-goddess cults were once, as above suggested, widespread from the Mediterranean regions to Mesopotamia, from where, during the proto-historic epoch, they may have migrated up to the Dravidian area of civilization, situated far east; this notwithstanding, pig is an animal sacred to some Austro-Asiatic tribes of India too, which circumstance suggests the possible indigenousness, at least in part, of sow-goddess cults there. To confine the discussion to Orissa's context, pig is one of the most important sacrificial animals in the shamanistic religion of the Hill Saoras, who ceremonially behead one of these animals in connection with particular fertility rites. Pig is also regarded as the mount of Labosum, the virtually androgyne agrarian divinity who, among the Hill Saoras, replaces the figure of the earth goddess (absent from their pantheon). This divinity mounted on pig is imagined to live beneath the soil. Moreover, eating pork is taboo to the Hill Saora women, nor can the flesh of sacrificed pigs be offered to the Hill Saora female deities and spirits.[224] The last-mentioned cultic feature reminds of the taboo of pig observed by the womenfolk during the Eleusian Mysteries, anciently celebrated in the Greek area of civilization in honour of goddess Demeter with the mass slaughter of pigs. Since the Hill Saoras of Orissa might represent a branch of the ancient people of the Śavaras, frequently mentioned in Sanskrit texts, it appears plausible that some kind of a sow-goddess cult, traces of which are, as observed, still today discernible, may have been once diffused among the Austro-Asiatic speakers settled in the Indian sub-continent. Although further evidences are required to verify such a hypothesis, it may be inferred here that Vārāhī cult evolved, at least for some aspects of its, out of this supposedly Austro-Asiatic cultic complex centring round the veneration of a sow-goddess and the relative sacrifices of pigs, still today performed by many tribes of the Deccan; to this were added, in course of time, various contributions from other sow-goddess cults having originated in the Near East and subsequently migrated, perhaps following the Dravidians, to the Indian sub-continent.

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[220] J. Voss, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-70, 173-4 and 200.

[221] *Ibid.*, pp. 218-21; M. Gimbutas, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

[222] J. Voss, *op. cit.*, pp. 145, 202, 244 ff., 256 ff.

[223] B. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, I, p. 260.

What stated so far with reference to the worship of the Sacred Sow finds some verification in the overall iconography of the Hindu goddess Vārāhī, particularly in consideration of her characteristic pot-belly, which also typifies her Orissan imagery. Vārāhī's spherical and prominent belly is likely to convey the meaning of the vase of cosmic transformation, which, as earlier suggested, was symbolised in many Neolithic cultures by the Sacred Sow's womb. Other Hindu deities, e.g., Kubera and Gaṇeśa, as well as their respective attendants, the *yakṣas* and *gaṇas*, are depicted as pot-bellied genii, but in all these cases, the feature in question appears more directly related to the ideas of fecundity, prosperity and wealth associated with those deities. The case of Vārāhī appears different: her pot-belly, indeed, is much more evidently related to the concept about the Cosmic Womb of the Goddess, the 'generative vase' filled with the sacred blood and ovules of the Cosmic Sow and representing the metaphysical source of life, death and rebirth.

An analogous symbolism is present in the so-called Kumbhamātās (Mothers-in-the-Pot) worshipped throughout India from the hoary past, even though the latter female deities — represented by pots filled with water and often identified with village goddesses — are more pronouncedly associated with fertility cults centring round the archetypal belief in the holiness of the water element. In accordance with this, the reference animal of the Mother-in-the-Pot is serpent (likewise associated with sacred waters) rather than the boar or pig. As a reverse proof of this, the Serpent-Mother of the Śāktas of Bengal, Manasā, is normally worshipped in the shape of one or more pots filled with water (*manasār-bāri*).[225]

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[224] V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, pp. 80, 192, 298, 322-3, 360 and 523.

Another feature showing the linkage of the iconography of goddess Vārāhī to pre-Vedic cults is the fish she usually holds in one of her hands. The introduction of the fish as an attribute of Vārāhī is traced from the eighth-ninth centuries AD in Central India and Rajasthan,[226] and to a still earlier date in Orissa. Fish is an universal fertility symbol associated with matriarchal beliefs. The rites of fish, meat and wine, possibly related in the origin to fertility magic and to erotic practices associated with female-oriented cults, formed the basis of the Tāntric ritual known as *pañca-makāra*. The offering of fish, meat and alcoholic drinks to an all-powerful Goddess is a very common feature of primitive religions, particularly the Indian ones.[227] According to J. Gonda,[228] the eating of fish was adopted in the *pañca-makāra* ritual as a corroborant of generative power. All over the Ancient World fish was a symbol of abundant growth and rapid reproduction; the motif of fish quickly multiplying throughout the world also recurs in some tribal myths of Orissa.[229]

Fish symbolism is somehow connected with serpent symbolism. Serpent is, in fact, another primeval symbol of fertility and, more generally speaking, of matriarchal wisdom. As stated in chapter 1, serpent represents above all the principle of the cyclic development of the universe related to the phases of the moon and to the liquid substances. In the Indian tradition, fish has ever been regarded as a sort of 'water-snake'. As regards the tribals of Orissa, there is in this connection an enlightening Bondo myth in which Mahāprabhu, the supreme god of the tribe, creates different species of fish by cutting a snake into pieces.[230] In India, however, fish, when acting as a religious symbol, is invested with a cosmogonic function which does not belong to serpent as such. In the classical Hindu mythology, the *matsya* (fish) always embodies this creative function, either in its male form (the Fish of Deluge, an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu) and in its female one (Satyavatī, a heroine of the *Mahābhārata* described as a fish-smelling girl, herself born from a she-fish, who gives origin to all of the royal lineages figuring in the great epic[231]). The implicit association of the fish held by Vārāhī with the cosmogonic principle appears manifest if one accepts the view of R.C. Agrawala, according to which this fish is a *rohita* (*Cyprinus rohitaka*), viz., the goldfish chosen by Viṣṇu as the best-suited form for his Matsya *avatāra*. A goldfish belonging to this species forms the lower part of the god's body in some therio-anthropomorphic images of this incarnation of his.[232]

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[225] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-9.

[226] R.C. Agrawala, 'Fish and Vārāhī in Ancient Indian Sculpture', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XII, No. 1, pp. 1-3.

[227] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-8.

[228] J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

[229] V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, pp. 273 ff.

[230] *Ibid.*, pp. 274-5.

[231] J. Dowson, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

It can be altogether maintained that fish, a primitive symbol of the feminine, has had in all epochs a powerful cosmogonic meaning. Since the Neolithic period, this animal was regarded as a symbol of the ultramundane womb of the great Goddess, the all-powerful dispenser of life, death and regeneration. The symbolic equivalence of fish and uterus is essentially due to their similar anatomic shapes and their damp qualities.[233] So, once again, one meets with the idea of a Cosmic Womb, belonging to the great Goddess and conceived as the mythic *locus* of all process of transformation. It cannot be, thus, by chance that a fish appears in most of the Vārāhī images carved out in India during the medieval period. As above stated, indeed, the Sacred Sow had been paralleled from the hoary past with the uterus of the great goddess.

It must be concluded that the fish associated with the Vārāhī image cannot be regarded as an exclusively Tāntric feature connected with the *pañca-makāra* form of worship. In fact, the earliest sculptural representation of Vārāhī with fish in India, which is probably the one carved on the *jagamohana* of Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Bhubaneswar (seventh century AD), dates from a period in which left-hand Tāntric rites were still to become popular in Orissa.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ICONOGRAPHY OF VĀRĀHĪ IN ORISSA

With a few exceptions, the images of Vārāhī having survived in Orissa are all assignable to a period ranging from the seventh to thirteenth century AD, which roughly coincides with the period of the greatest ascendancy of Śāktism in the country. In her role as a *mātṛkā*, Vārāhī appears in all of the Orissan sets of Divine Mothers having been carved out between the seventh and thirteenth centuries AD, while in her role as an independent Śākta-Tāntric deity she is depicted in cult icons dating from the tenth century AD till about the end of the Somavaṁśī period. The images of Vārāhī installed as *pārśva-devatās* generally belong to a still later period.

In the earliest Orissan specimens of a *mātṛkā* set, i.e., the ones respectively belonging to the Paraśurāmeśvara and Vaitāl temples at Bhubaneswar and to the temple of Siṁhanātha on the Mahanadi, Vārāhī is already depicted with the fish (*Pl.* III). In these temples she is, furthermore, represented as seated on a squatting male figure rather than on her later *vāhana*, the buffalo, an iconographic feature recalling the prostrate male serving as the *vāhana* of Cāmuṇḍā, Bhairava and other left-hand Tāntric deities. Some Vārāhī images from Rajasthan are reportedly represented with *preta-vāhana*,[234] yet this iconographic feature is not found in Orissa. Starting from the ninth century AD, however, the goddess was regularly represented by the Orissan sculptors as mounted on buffalo, the *vāhana* of the god of death Yama.

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[232] R.C. Agrawala, 'A Rare Image of Vārāhī from Almora Region', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XII, No. 3, p. 162; see also W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, p. 207 and n. 20.

[233] M. Gimbutas, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-63.

Other Tāntric attributes associated with early Vārāhī images of Orissa are the *kuṭhāra* (hatchet) and possibly, in the Siṁhanātha example, the *kapāla* (skull-bowl). The fact that, unlike the weapons and mounts variously associated with each of the other *mātṛkās*, Vārāhī's weapons and mount in these early examples are not the ones prescribed in the iconography of the goddess' 'official' male counterpart, the Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu, may constitute a further proof of the virtual independence of the figure of Vārāhī from that of Viṣṇu/Varāha. The subsequent Tāntric developments in the iconography of Vārāhī, as well as the introduction of the buffalo as her *vāhana*, did but accentuate her original extraneousness to the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu, in spite of the attempts made by the authors of the Purāṇas to connect her theologically with the latter deity.

In the iconography of Vārāhī as it developed in Orissa, a synthesis of symbols of life and death was, thus, achieved beginning from early stages. The deadly aspect of Vārāhī also found an expression in the popular belief, once widespread over Orissa, according to which this goddess was the causer of epidemics and her propitiation was, thus, necessary to ward off the latter.[235] This approximates the worship of Vārāhī to that of the Hindu goddesses presiding over epidemics such as Śītalā and others.

Tāntric temples dedicated to Vārāhī alone started being erected in the coastal plains of Orissa in the tenth century AD, the period of transition from the Bhauma-kara to the Somavaṁśī rule. Though the only extant temple among these is the one at Chaurasi in the Prachi Valley, (*fig.* 51) a number of medieval cult icons representing Vārāhī, presently acting as the respective presiding deities of as many modern temples, are believed to have originally belonged to collapsed Śākta shrines erected during the medieval period.[236]

Vārāhī temple at Chaurasi, dating from the tenth century AD,[237] was built employing the typically Śākta-Tāntric *khākharā* order. Its walls are profusely carved with figures of *nāgas* and *nāgīs* and, furthermore, present the very rare feature of a set of erotic images pertaining to specific Tāntric sexual rites being housed in the major niches. In many cases the male figure appearing in these erotic panels holds a *khaṭvāṅga*, suggesting he may be a Kāpālika. The sexual rituals performed by the Kāpālikas were very similar to those performed by the

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[234] R.C. Agrawala, *art. cit.*, pp. 161-2.

[235] K. C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa*, p. 334.

[236] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1076.

[237] Id., *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, p. 274.

Kaulas (or better, as discussed in chapter 2, by their Tāntric forerunners), of whom this temple was most likely one of the main centres in Orissa.[238] It seems, on the whole, that Vārāhī temple at Chaurasi, located on a rather secluded spot, served as an important, although isolated seat of ritual love-making as performed by the interrelated Kaula and Kāpālika sects in central Orissa. The same argument appears valid in the case of the earlier Sixty-Four Yoginī temple at Hirapur too. The colossal two-armed image of Vārāhī enshrined within the temple sanctum at Chaurasi represents the goddess in her most Tāntricised aspect. She is seated in *lalitāsana* on a cushion placed above her mount the buffalo and holds *matsya* in her right hand and *kapāla* in her left. Her huge spherical belly is well-matched with her bulbous breasts. She is richly bejewelled, three-eyed and haloed, while her hairdo is arranged into spiral coils. Two other Vārāhī images, both pot-bellied and holding *kapāla* among their attributes like the presiding deity of the temple, are loosely placed within its *jagamohana*. The *vāmācāra* nature of this Śākta-Tāntric shrine appears, on the whole, self-evident.

The biggest cult icon of Vārāhī having survived in Orissa is the one serving as the *grāma-devatā* in the village of Narendrapur, about 40 km south-east of Bhadrak (Baleswar district). The image, broken in pieces, was originally ten feet in height. It was once worshipped in a thatched house, but has been now installed in a modern temple. The goddess, two-armed, is here depicted in a peculiar sitting pose termed as *bhadrāsana* (with both legs hanging from the seat), and has a seated human figure placed between her legs who replaces her traditional *vāhana* the buffalo.[239] Similar iconographic features are present in the four Vārāhī images collectively worshipped as the presiding deity of Pañca-Vārāhī temple at Satbhaya (Cuttack district), the fifth image that originally completed the set being lost. Probably the Śākta-Tāntric cult of Pañca-Vārāhī flourished in Orissa only, since no other such temple has been noticed so far in other regions of India.[240] At Banchua, a village of Keonjhar district situated on the Bhadrak-Anantapur road, another old Vārāhī image is worshipped as Caṇḍī in a modern temple. On the pedestal of this cult icon, along with the buffalo, is carved a *nara-vāhana* (vehicle formed by a row of men).[241] All the cult icons described so far represent the sow-goddess as pot-bellied, two-armed, holding a fish and (probably) a *kapāla* in her right and left hand respectively. This iconography appears modelled on a common Tāntric archetype.[242]

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[238] *Ibid.*, I, pp. 196 and 352-3.

[239] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 334; T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1077; H.C. Das, 'Religious History of Balasore', in S. Pani and H.C. Das, eds., *Glimpses of History and Culture of Balasore*, Bhubaneswar, 1988, p. 275.

[240] H.C. Das, 'Brāhmaṇical Tāntric Art of Orissa', p. 126.

[241] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1077.

[242] *Ibid.*, pp. 1076-7.

In addition to the above-described ones, two other noticeable medieval cult icons representing Vārāhī are respectively found at Puri, where a small but beautiful image of the goddess, dating from about the tenth century AD, acts as the presiding deity of a modern temple located in the quarter of Balisahi, and at Domagandara near Ayodhya (Mayurbhanj district), where the worshipped image of the goddess is, on the contrary, very big in size. A temple dedicated to Vārāhī once stood on the northern limit of Ekāmra *kṣetra* (Bhubaneswar), as is demonstrated by its mention in an old Orissan Sanskrit text.[243] According to K.C. Panigrahi, there is evidence enough that a temple of Vārāhī was once in existence also in the premises of the old Bhañja fort of Khiching: one of the latter's parts is, in fact, presently termed as Vahri, a word that is considered by that scholar as a local corruption of Vārāhī.[244]

In the Gaṅga period Vārāhī was generally portrayed as a well-proportioned standing female figure having the face of a sow, in this contrasting with the earlier, pot-bellied cult images representing the goddess in a seated pose, either when she acted as a *mātṛkā* or as an independent cult divinity. The sculptors of that epoch were seemingly unaware of the deep esoteric meaning associated in former times with the big belly of this goddess, immediately reminding of the cosmic womb of the Sacred Sow; significantly enough, they also ceased to represent the fish traditionally placed in Vārāhī's major right hand, which, as already stated, was probably another symbol of the Goddess' womb. The main source of inspiration for the later imagery of Vārāhī in Orissa was possibly constituted by earlier sculptures meant to represent this deity as a sensual *yoginī*, an example of which appears in the Sixty-Four Yoginī temple at Hirapur (ninth century AD, *fig.* 21). Another possible model was represented by the slender-looking image of Vārāhī belonging to the great temple, having now ruined, of goddess Bhīmeśvarī (Cāmuṇḍā) at Pedagadi in Mayurbhanj district, assignable to the tenth-eleventh centuries AD.[245]

The most impressive and best preserved among the examples of Gaṅga art under discussion is the one, four-armed, which is installed in the northern *pārśva-devatā* niche of Gaṅgeśvarī temple at Beyalisbati, not far from Konarak (thirteenth century AD, *fig.* 18). Vārāhī stands here in *tribhaṅga* pose licking blood from the *kapāla* she holds in her major left hand; in the other hands she holds a dagger, shield and either a sword or club. Her body ornamentation, as well as her coiffure formed by serpentine locks, are wonderfully carved. The buffalo mount is absent here. A two-armed and sow-faced female attendant holding dagger and *kapāla*, iconographically very similar to the goddess, flank the latter on either side at the base of the sculpture.[246] An image of Vārāhī showing identical iconographic characteristics acts as the northern *pārśva-devatā* of the small shrine of goddess Amṛta Locanā, located within the compound of Buddhanātha Śiva temple at Garudipanchana (Bhubaneswar area). This example, less refined than the Beyalisbati one, is likewise datable to the thirteenth century AD.[247]

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[243] M.P. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 123.

[244] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

[245] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, pp. 345-6.

Sixty-four yoginīs

In all Indian traditions the term *yoginī* indicates any female demon or spirit endowed with magical powers, a fairy, witch, sorceress or ogress; the term also stands for a class of female attendants of Durgā, and sometimes, as a proper noun, for Durgā herself (Yoginī). From the grammatical viewpoint, *yoginī* is clearly derived from *yoga* (in the acceptation as 'magical art'), with this laying stress on the magical powers, in some contexts beneficent and in some others maleficent, which were attributed by tradition to these supernatural beings or were believed to be bestowed by them on their votaries.[248]

Yet the term *yoga*, as it has ever been employed in Indian religions, means in the first place 'junction' or 'union' (of one's individual soul with the Absolute), for which reason the *yoginīs*, when being conceived as *śaktis* or divine creative energies, can also personify, by virtue of their collective verbal designation, an entire class of 'Powers of Realisation'.[249] Some particular groups of medieval Tāntric adepts used to evoke these *śaktis* to fulfil their own secular desires or to gain the *siddhis* (magical faculties) enabling them to get integrated into the Absolute (Śiva-Śakti). The *yoginīs* were propitiated through a congeries of complicated magico-esoteric rituals forming the object of speculation of a number of later medieval Tāntric schools. The latter, however, will not be discussed here in that such a digression would go beyond the purpose of the present work.

Indeed, in these developed Tāntric formulations, by far later than the time of erection of Yoginī temples in Middle India (Orissa included), the *yoginīs* progressively ceased to act as personal divinities to assume more and more abstract characteristics, until they became mere spiritual symbols having a supportive role in the process of yogic meditation. Rather than being still regarded as goddesses by full right (like in the origins), they were then identified with the angles of a *maṇḍala*, *cakra* or *yantra*, on which a Tāntric initiate had to focus the strain on his meditation to gain the path of ultimate knowledge, leading to *mokṣa* (liberation).[250]

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[246] Id., *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, II, p. 633.

[247] Id., *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1306.

[248] M. Monier-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 858.

[249] H. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

[250] R.M. Cimino, 'Le Yoginī ed i loro luoghi di culto', *Rivista degli studi orientali*, Roma, vol. LV (1981), pp. 45-7.

Thus, in their later developmental phase, *yoginīs* were changed into pure seats of power radiating with a spiritual energy that was believed to expand the *sādhaka*'s knowledge, and were no longer worshipped as Śākta divinities. The form of Yoginī cult that asserted itself in Orissa during the Bhauma-kara epoch, however, precedes in time such later mystic and philosophical developments, for which reason the present section deals exclusively with the *yoginīs* in their capacity as cult deities, to whom two important sanctuaries were dedicated by the monarchs of Orissa in the ninth-tenth centuries AD. Nothing is known for a certainty of the historical evolution of Yoginī cult in the country apart from the architectural and sculptural evidence constituted by these two temples.

HYPOTHESES ON THE ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE OF YOGINĪ CULT

The origin of Yoginī cult is shrouded in mystery, nor is clear what this cult precisely consisted of during the early medieval period. The main reason for this is the non-availability of ancient texts relating to the cult practices connected with the worship of *yoginīs*, even though the latter deities are often mentioned in later Vedic and post-Vedic literature as manifestations of the female principle. The Śākta-Tāntric pattern of Yoginī cult came to existence in India towards the sixth-seventh centuries AD and continued ever after to flourish as a magico-esoteric cult centring round the propitiation of a wide gamut of *ugra* forms of Śiva and the Devī. It is known that magical and supernatural faculties — with a view to the destruction of enemies — were believed to be imparted on the practitioners of this cult through the help of the *śaktis* collectively termed as *yoginīs*.[251]

With reference to the pristine form of Yoginī cult prior to its gradual absorption into Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, it has been suggested that 'originally the *yoginīs* were probably human beings, women of flesh and blood, priestesses who were supposed to be possessed by the goddess, and later they were raised to the status of divinities'.[252] These females operating in the sacred sphere, from a certain stage deified as *yoginīs*, may have been the depositories of the archaic magico-esoteric traditions of the Munda and Dravidian tribes of Middle India, whose pre-patriarchal forms of religion, taken as a whole, were probably dominated by shamanistic and divinatory practices, forms of sex-worship associated with fertility magic rites and of sympathetic and imitative magic, the propitiation of dangerous divinities-spirits dwelling in the natural world, and the worship of dead ancestors (often associated with megalithic ceremonies), in which female celebrants may have played a fundamental role.

Tantrism, which utilised a great deal of the said primitive cult practices to give shape to its peculiar religious synthesis, is known to have regarded since the origin all women as manifestations of Śakti, the divine female principle. Hence, there probably came the identification of shamanins, witches and priestesses, who had been playing so relevant a role in the religions of the non-Āryan peoples, with *yoginīs*, conceived at one time as a group of dreadful female deities or spirits endowed with magical powers and as a collective manifestation of the Mahādevī. This revolutionary conception, free from caste and patriarchal prejudices, implied the attribution to women, especially those belonging to the śūdra castes (culturally related to the tribals), of priestly and preceptorial functions within the fold of Śākta-Tantrism.[253] These śūdra women were, both by birth and education, the cultural heiresses of the archaic tribal traditions revived by Tantrism. The deified *yoginīs* of the medieval epoch may have been, thus, regarded by their Tāntric devotees as the mythical 'ancestresses' of these mundane *yoginīs*.

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[251] H.C. Das, *Tāntricism: A Study of the Yoginī Cult*, New Delhi, 1981, p. 3.

[252] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

As *vāmācāra* Tantrism accentuated the sexual element in Śakti-worship, it progressively evolved into a form of erotic devotion addressed above all to the earthly manifestation of the great Goddess, that is, woman. Mundane *yoginīs*, thus, began to act as the lovers of their *yogins*, to whom they were linked by a relationship based on mutual initiation to the divine mysteries of sex. Especially in the outlook of the *Yoginī Kaula* doctrine of Matsyendranātha (see chapter 2), sexual intercourse between a *yogin* and his own *yoginī* was conceived as a mystic ritual imitation of the mythical everlasting copulation of Śiva and Śakti (or, as they are called by Matsyendranātha, of Bhairava and Bhairavī).

It has been inferred by some that Sixty-Four Yoginī temples, built to enshrine the images of these goddesses along with a changeable number of Bhairava images placed at the centre of an open-air arena, were the seats of orgies having a relation with the Kaula-Kāpālika cultic syndrome.[254] Such a statement, however, is destined to remain a mere conjecture unless it is warranted by the discovery of new literary evidences regarding Yoginī cult. On the other hand, the scarcity of literary sources about this cult seems simply due to the fact that the practices associated with it were so secret, that they remained effectively hidden through the ages. At any rate, the expression *yoginī-melana* ('union with a *yoginī*', meant either in a spiritual and in a material sense), often recurring in the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* of Matsyendranātha (eleventh century AD),[255] is believed to indicate the actual performance of mystic-erotic rituals within the secluded Yoginī temples of the medieval period. It is probable that on such occasions, thanks to a process of sympathetic-imitative magic, each initiate believed, and was believed by the other participants, to turn into an earthly manifestation of one of the Sixty-Four Bhairavas mentioned in Āgamic texts,[256] and his associate *yoginī* 'of flesh and blood', into that of one of the sixty-four goddesses equally designed as *yoginīs*, whose images were enshrined in as many niches opening along the inner perimeter of the temple.

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[253] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

[254] C.L. Fabri, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[255] *Ibid.*, pp. 200-1.

[256] H.C. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-8.

So far as to the first hypothesis about the origin of Yoginī cult. A second line of inquiry connects the origin of the divine *yoginīs* with primitive Yakṣa cult. According to this view the female spirits of vegetation and waters definable as spirits of fate, dryads, nymphs, naiads, nereids, fairies, child-affecting ogresses, etc., who had been propitiated from time immemorial by the indigenous peoples of India under the collective designation of *yakṣīs*, would have been accepted into the Brāhmaṇical and Mahāyāna Buddhist pantheons and given a sectarian justification by calling them *yoginīs*. This may explain the hundreds and hundreds of names in which *yoginīs* were worshipped in the medieval epoch according to different and confused regional and sectarian traditions.[257] As stated in chapter 1, *yakṣīs* were anciently considered to be the dispensers of both well-being and misfortune to mankind, according to the variations in their changeable and unforeseeable character. After they were modified to *yoginī* form these divinities-spirits came to personify the mysterious supernatural forces underlying the shamanistic and black-magic practices of the primitive tribes of India, often performed by women.[258]

In view of this approach, the deities called *yoginīs* appear to have originally belonged to the same female-oriented religious complex which also gave rise to the worships of *grāmadevatās* and of the *mātṛkās*. In this connection, some scholars opine that the traditional number of sixty-four *yoginīs*, which is well-established in later medieval Purāṇic texts, was obtained by multiplying by eight the original number of the *mātṛkās* (in this case imagined, after the Tantra tradition, to form a group of eight rather than of seven), as if each *mātṛkā* had possessed within herself eight potential *yoginīs*. Such a statement would be supported by the enumeration of the traditional *mātṛkās*, more often of only some among them, in many lists of *yoginīs*, and also by the iconic depiction of *mātṛkā* figures among the female deities enshrined in Yoginī temples.[259] Yet such a hypothesis appears to be mere speculation, not attested by any literary source. In this connection, C. Fabri has aptly remarked:

> There is, to be sure, a possibility of counting eight Mothers, multiplied by eight attendants, which would tally with sixty-four. But there is not the slightest evidence at hand for this hypothesis, and unless someone can produce some text that proves that each of the eight Mothers possessed eight *yoginīs* in waiting, the suggestion remains attractive but unproved.[260]

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[257] A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Washington, 1928, Pt. I, p. 9; C.L. Fabri, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

[258] M. Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, London, 1958, pp. 343 ff.

[259] V.W. Karambelkar, 'Matsyendranātha and His Yoginī Cult', *India Historical Quarterly*, vol. XXXI (1955), No. 4, pp. 368-71; N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

[260] C.L. Fabri, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

The number sixty-four very often recurs in the Hindu tradition, so that there is no need to put it in relation with a supposed squaring of the number of the Divine Mothers (which was never fixed once and for all to eight, being in case the tradition of Saptamātṛkās the prevalent one in both Hinduism and Jainism). The increasing popularity of the worship of the Divine Mothers in the early medieval period may have contributed to revive and renew the primitive Yoginī cult infusing into it a good deal of Tāntric elements, but yet the indisputable relation of the *mātṛkās* with the *yoginīs* must not be taken as a filiation link. On the contrary, it appears much more probable that both Mātṛkā and Yoginī cults have evolved side by side with several reciprocal contaminations — see the concept about the Circle of Mothers, so similar to that about the Circle of Yoginīs — from a primitive form of Śāktism pivoted upon the propitiation of ambivalent female deities and spirits having a two-fold, malignant and benignant nature.

The possibility of an evolution from Yakṣa cult to Yoginī cult appears further substantiated by the formal and conceptual affinities between the respective places of worship. The worship of *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs* took place under a sacred tree, on the roots of which a rough stone altar was fixed. In some ancient Buddhist relieves, reminding of some scenes of tree-worship depicted on the Indus Valley seals, the tree appears surrounded by a circular, square or octagonal rail (*vedikā*), probably made of wood. In the relieves of Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati the rail appears to have developed into a pavilion surrounding the tree and resting on pilasters or columns. A circular enclosure open to the sky is also the distinctive shape of the shrines dedicated to the *yoginīs*, in which the function of *axis mundi*, in the seats of Yakṣa-worship embodied by the tree itself, was now embodied by an iconic or aniconic image of the god Śiva (one or more Bhairava sculptures or, less frequently, a *liṅga*). The *yoginī* images surrounding the central cult object in a circle were normally inserted in niches opening along the inner wall of the enclosure, although in the initial stage they might even have been installed on simple stone pedestals in the open air.[261] The common archetype of these two kinds of a sanctuary is possibly represented by the megalithic circles of stones having been erected by the non-Āryan tribes of the Deccan from the Neolithic period until recent times. W. Crooke gives a description of some of these magical circles, at the centre of which there is always a big stone.[262]

It is certain that the *yoginīs* were mythically attributed a 'natural' tendency to dispose themselves in a circle having Śiva at its centre. This characteristic of theirs was developed by medieval Tantrism into a complex of mystic-yogic doctrines based on the meditation on Yoginī-*cakras*, the early form of which was, as evidenced by the above discussion, possibly derived from the idea of a 'Circle of Spirits' that was, in all likelihood, already present in some of the most archaic Indian megalithic cultures as well as in some archaic forms of tree-worship. Other possible explanations of the concept about a Circle of Yoginīs have been already given in chapter 2, so they will not be repeated here; it is, however, extremely important to remind that, as pointed out by V.W. Karambelkar,[263] the circular shape and absence of roof of Yoginī temples find a justification in some ancient legends about the *yoginīs* themselves, according to which these deities use to roam about in a group in the air and, when they descend down, they always dispose themselves in a circle. The circular shape and the absence of roof, characterising all of the Yoginī temples as an exclusive feature, may have been, thus, motivated by the devotees' will to 'facilitate' the fancied descent of the goddesses to the place at which their representative icons were being adored. In this particular perspective, *yoginīs* come closer to the class of 'aerial' goddesses, who are still today, rather significantly, propitiated by the tribals of Orissa for fear of their malevolent attitude, than to the class of 'natural' goddesses, including *yakṣīs*, river goddesses, etc., who are generally supposed to be more beneficent than the former.

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[261] R.M. Cimino, *art. cit.*, pp. 50-1.

[262] W. Crooke, *Things Indian*, London, 1906, p. 151.

The circular Yoginī temple can be considered to be an iconic representation of Śiva and Śakti, the former being placed at the centre in the role as *axis mundi*, the latter having multiplied into sixty-four (or even more) female deities surrounding Śiva in a circle as per the *maṇḍala-cakra-yantra* tradition. This peculiar kind of a temple architecture developed in the central and eastern parts of India between the eighth and twelfth centuries AD, the period of the greatest influence of Śākta-Tantrism in those regions. The architectural rules on which the construction of these temples was based find no mention in the *śilpa-śāstras* (treatises of Hindu temple art and architecture), for the probable reason that such rules, as in the case of the esoteric content of Yoginī cult, were kept fast secret by the sectarian practitioners of this cult.[264]

Of the extant Yoginī temples, four are located in the Gwalior-Bundelkhand region (the ones at Khajuraho, at Bheraghat near Jabalpur, at Mitauli near Gwalior and at Dudhai near Lalitpur), while other two are in Orissa (the ones at Hirapur near Bhubaneswar and at Ranipur-Jharial in Balangir district). Other similar shrines are reported to have once existed in different parts of India (for instance, at Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu), but, in most cases, they lie now in a ruined state.[265] Leaving aside the discussion of the shrines situated outside Orissa, which does not form the argument of the present work, the attention will be here focused on the Sixty-Four Yoginī temples of Hirapur and Ranipur-Jharial, providing us with the only evidence — unfortunately, rather inadequate — of what Yoginī cult stood for in

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[263] V.W. Karambelkar, *art. cit.*, p. 373.

[264] H.C. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-22.

[265] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, pp. 105 and 120-1; H.C. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-2; R.M. Cimino, *art. cit.*, p. 51.

Orissa in the ninth-tenth centuries AD, the period in which these shrines were built and consecrated.

HIRAPUR

K.N. Mahahpatra,[266] who in 1953 discovered the Yoginī temple at Hirapur, has dated it to the ninth century AD, while he has assigned the Yoginī temple at Ranipur-Jharial to the tenth century AD. According to his interpretation, now accepted by most of scholars, the Tāntric form of Yoginī cult would have had, so far as Orissa is concerned, its original centre of diffusion at Hirapur, where the Bhauma-kara kings established the earliest *pīṭha* consecrated to this cult in the region; from there, in the course of a century, the cult would have gone up the main Orissan waterways to finally reach the territory of Dakṣiṇa Kośala, whose rulers, the Early Somavaṁśīs, established the Yoginī *pīṭha* at Ranipur-Jharial.

The contrary hypothesis advanced by K.C. Panigrahi,[267] according to whom the Hirapur shrine would have been erected in the eleventh century AD thanks to the patronage work of the Somavaṁśīs in the model of the Ranipur-Jharial one (which lay in the dynasty's original domains), appears untenable, in that the Yoginī temple at Hirapur clearly bears the characteristic features of the Bhauma art tradition and must, thus, be earlier than the Ranipur-Jharial one.

The hypaethral sanctuary dedicated to the Sixty-Four Yoginīs at Hirapur near Bhubaneswar is regarded by some as the most beautiful among the shrines belonging to this class (*fig*. 58). On the inner face of its circular wall there are sixty niches housing the images of as many *yoginīs*, while three more *yoginī* images (the sixty-fourth being now missing) are inserted in niches opening in the *maṇḍapa* (pavilion) placed at the centre of the shrine, where they are accompanied by four ithyphallic Bhairava images (three mounted on a recumbent human body and one representing Aja-Ekapāda).

Admittance to the small circular arena is permitted by a projecting entrance that, when the whole is observed from above, gives the temple groundplan the form of a *yoni-paṭṭa* (the flat and circular stone pedestal on which a Śiva-*liṅga* is normally placed, provided with a spout-like projection which gives it a characteristic shape resembling the anatomic diagram of an uterus-*cum*-vagina).[268] This connection with the *yoni* symbolism is most likely not casual, for the concept of *maṇḍala* underlying the layout of a Yoginī temple, as discussed in chapter 2, represents Śiva encircled by numberless — the number sixty-four is but a mere convention

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[266] K.N. Mohapatra, 'A Note on the Hypaethral Temple of Sixty-four Yoginīs at Hirāpur', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. II, No. 2, pp. 23-44.

[267] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

[268] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

— projections of Śakti, who altogether form a sort of 'mystic womb' holding the male Puruṣa in its depth. A Yoginī temple, according to this interpretation, would represent Śiva and Śakti in one form (as it is the case with the *liṅga* inserted into the *yoni*). However, in the case of Hirapur, the central iconic representation of Śiva, formed by four different images of a Bhairava, is curiously accompanied in the central *maṇḍapa* by three (originally four) *yoginī* images, which fact is not clearly explainable.

On the outer face of the temple enclosure are carved the images of nine nice-looking female deities standing on severed human heads and associated with dogs and jackals. They represent the Nine Kātyāyanīs, the awe-inspiring and ferocious manifestations of Śakti who, according to the Oriyā version of the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, were created by Durgā along with the Sixty-Four Yoginīs for the sake of killing the demons.[269] Kātyāyanī was also the name under which the Bhauma-kara rulers of Orissa, on the initiative of whom the shrine of Hirapur was built, used to worship goddess Virajā, the form of Durgā that acted as the tutelary deity of their capital city, Jajpur.[270] It may be noticed, in this connection, that the ceremonial worship of nine Durgās (Navadurgās) under the form of nine different plants (*navapatrikā*) on the occasion of the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā* festival is a very popular tradition in eastern India, still today in vogue at the shrine of Virajā at Jajpur.[271] The nine ambivalent figures of Kātyāyanīs represented along with the Sixty-Four Yoginīs at Hirapur may, thus, be somehow connected with the concept about the nine vegetable forms of Durgā, which would tally with the view according to which *yoginī*s were originally *yakṣī*s, the female deities who best embodied the beneficent and maleficent energies of nature.

The sixty-three figures of *yoginī*s enshrined at Hirapur are exquisitely carved out of black chlorite, a material that has preserved all details of workmanship. All of them are represented in a standing pose and are provided with a *vāhana* of their own. Such *vāhana*s or vehicles can be alternatively formed either by animals (ass, alligator, the bird Garuḍa and other kinds of birds, bull, boar, buffalo, camel, crow, cock, cow, crab, duck, different kinds of deer, elephant, fish, frog, horse, jackal, lion, *makara*, mongoose, mouse, peacock, ram, scorpion, serpent, tortoise, etc.) or by some vegetable symbols or inanimate objects (cave, drum, full-blown lotus and other kinds of flowers, lines of waves, lotus creeper, severed human head, shell, small table, vases, wheels, etc.). Besides, four *yoginī*s have a corpse as their vehicle.[272] All of these *vāhana*s must have had, in times gone by, a direct implication in the identification of the *yoginī*s by their votaries, but now the esoteric meaning of such animal, vegetable or inanimate symbols of the powers variously embodied by the different *yoginīs* is, in most cases, forever lost.

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[269] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[270] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, p. 10.

[271] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[272] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-6.

Some of the *yoginī* images enshrined at Hirapur can be identified as *mātṛkā* figures. The Aṣṭamātṛkās mentioned in many Purāṇic texts, namely, Brāhmī, Śivānī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Indrāṇī, Cāmuṇḍā and Nṛsiṁhī, are all represented here amidst the Sixty-Four Yoginīs, even though their correct identification is in some cases doubtful. The iconographic features of these *mātṛkā/yoginī* figures, however, differ to a great extent from those found in the *mātṛkā* sets proper of Orissa. Moreover, some of the *yoginīs* of the shrine of Hirapur represent river goddesses. Gaṅgā mounted on *makara*, Yamunā on tortoise, Narmadā and Sarasvatī on lines of waves, Kauverī on a row of seven *ratna-kalaśas* (vases filled with riches) and another unidentified goddess mounted on crab, can be all regarded as river or water goddesses.[273] As the female deities belonging to the latter class are known to have evolved from the more ancient *yakṣīs*, the sacred imagery at Hirapur bears a possible witness of Yoginī cult's pristine linkage to Yakṣa cult. Also the vegetable *vāhanas* depicted on the pedestals of some other *yoginīs* at Hirapur may testify to this hypothesised original relation.

The extraordinary variety of iconographic types being offered by the *yoginīs* enshrined at Hirapur is so synthesised by K.S. Behera:

> Some of the female figures with their face resembling that of monkey, lion, snake, bear or elephant look terrific and have been carved with great artistic care. Some other *yoginīs* are decorated with garlands of skulls or snakes; some raising elephant or lion over their heads look very fierce, while still others decked in ornaments like bracelet, armlet and girdle and having bejewelled crowns on their heads look lively and remarkable, being endowed with great artistic elegance and feminine grace and delicacy.[274]

Such a great variety of aspects shows that the *yoginīs* as a whole personify both the *saumya* (propitious) and the *ugra* (terrible) aspects of the universal Śakti (*figs.* from 19 to 31).

In the words of K.V. Soundara Rajan, the Sixty-Four Yoginī temple at Hirapur was meant as 'a subtle and esoteric perfumed garden', in which elements of different Brāhmaṇical cults were strangely amalgamated. Thus, one can find there elements of Sapta/Aṣṭamātṛkās, of river goddesses, of Śītalā and Bhairavī, of the Śaivite *pārśva-devatā* plexus formed by Gaṇeśa-Kārttikeya-Pārvatī, of purely Śākta goddesses such as Durgā and Kālī/Cāmuṇḍā and non-Śākta ones such as Śrī-Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī, as well as a congeries of symbols related to the Sāṁkhya doctrine of the five elements (fire, air, water, earth and ether) and of the three major principles (*manas, buddhi, ahaṁkāra*) and, last but not least, a number of references to the Tāntric-yogic concept about *kuṇḍalinī*, the Serpent Power (the attribution of a serpent-*vāhana*, a serpent-face or a *nāga-pāśa* to some among these *yoginīs*).[275]

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[273] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-5.

[274] K.S. Behera, 'The Evolution of Śakti Cult at Jajpur, Bhubaneswar and Puri', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 82-3.

The *yoginī* images at Hirapur are for the most part two-armed, otherwise they are four-armed. Only one image, enshrined in niche # 31, is ten-armed; this figure of a goddess, standing on a full-blown lotus, is bigger than the others and is worshipped as the presiding deity of the *pīṭha* under the name of Mahāmāyā.[276]

Iconographically, the Mahāmāyā image enshrined at Hirapur conforms to the description of this deity as given in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*. The same text (Ch. 54-58) also describes the Tāntric method of worship adopted for the propitiation of Mahāmāyā, the so-called *Vaiṣṇavī-tantra*, making reference to sacrifice of animals and of human beings in her honour.[277] The identification of goddess Kālī with the *māyā* principle, the Power of Cosmic Delusion emanating from Viṣṇu (personified as Mahāmāyā or Yoganidrā), was an accomplished fact at the time when the *Kālikā Purāṇa* was being composed (*ca.* fourteenth century AD[278]); yet, an equalisation of the metaphysical principle of Viṣṇu-*māyā* to the great Goddess venerated by the Śāktas is already found in the first episode of the *Devī-Māhātmya* (myth of Madhu and Kaiṭabha), the composition of which dates from the Gupta period. With some approximation, it can be maintained that the Mahāmāyā of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, the one installed as the presiding deity of the Sixty-Four Yoginī temple at Hirapur and the one referred to in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* as a Vaiṣṇavī Śakti, are one and the same divine person, identifiable as an aspect of Durgā/Kālī.

It is not known whether animal and human sacrifices were being performed at the shrine of Hirapur in accordance with the worship pattern prescribed in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* for the propitiation of goddess Mahāmāyā, although, given the bloody nature of Śakti cult in Orissa in the early and middle parts of the medieval period, this possibility appears rather probable. In fact, it seems that Sixty-Four Yoginī cult gained ascendancy in Orissa during the Bhaumakara period through the medium of the Kāpālikas, who, as it is well-known, had a predilection for animal and human sacrifices. Two terrific figures of a naked male carved on either side of the narrow passage leading into the open-air arena of Hirapur may be tentatively identified as Tāntric *ācāryas*,[279] possibly belonging to the Kāpālika sect; each of them, in fact, has emaciated body, sunken belly and matted hair, wears a garland of skulls and anklets of

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275. K.V. Soundara Rajan, *Early Kalinga Art and Architecture*, Delhi, 1984, pp. 139-40.

276. H.C. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

277. R.C. Hazra, *Sudies in the Upapurāṇas*, II, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 215-6.

278. W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

279. K.S. Behera, *art. cit.*, p. 83.

snakes, and is accompanied on the pedestal by some fully naked male attendants carrying or drinking from bowls (*kapālas*?) and holding in their hands some other indistinct objects resembling sacrificial knives.

It is a fact that the only extant sanctuary consecrated to Yoginī cult in the coastal provinces of Orissa was not built in an urban centre, but rather at such a secluded site as Hirapur. This may suggest that the odd and licentious *vāmācāra* practices that were carried out by the practitioners of this cult (Kāpālikas? Kaulas?), although they were fostered by the Bhauma-kara rulers, were probably pushed into the hinterlands owing to the resistance put up by the mainstream of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism to their spread over the main *bhakti* centres of the Orissan kingdom. More generally speaking, Yoginī cult was too pronouncedly an esoteric and intellectual thing to win the hearts and minds of the non-initiated Hindu devotees of Orissa. The practitioners of this cult evidently insisted too much on the institutionalisation of spiritualism without putting forward a genuine message of liberation intelligible to the mass of the devotees; at the same time, they isolated themselves from the latter by probably resorting to the exclusive practice of *pañca-makāra-sādhana* or to other ritualistic methodologies based on the excitation and feeding of the physical body as a way to self-realisation, which led them to lose the sense of the original spiritual goal of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism. Thus, Yoginī cult was destined to wither unseen in the lonely hide-outs of Hirapur, Ranipur-Jharial, Kajuraho, Bheraghat and a few other scattered sites, and was not able at all to survive the impetuous ascent of the *bhakti*-based religious movement that began in Middle India as a consequence of the early Muslim invasions.[280]

RANIPUR-JHARIAL

The temple complex of Ranipur-Jharial, so named after the two villages adjoining it, is situated about 100 km south-west of Balangir town. In the medieval epoch the site was a celebrated Hindu pilgrimage centre, known as Soma *tīrtha* and described as the Bhubaneswar of Dakṣiṇa Kośala on account of the multitude of temples which stood there. The *Vāmana Purāṇa* mentions it along with Virajā (Jajpur), Puruṣottama (Puri) and mount Mahendra, namely, the holiest *tīrtha*s of early medieval Orissa. The building of most of the monuments to be found at the place was due to the patronage work of the Early Somavaṁśī dynasty of Dakṣiṇa Kośala starting from the ninth century AD, or perhaps from a still earlier date.[281]

Soma *tīrtha* was a centre of worship of Śiva, Viṣṇu and Śakti. The Goddess, worshipped at the place in her respective manifestations as Sixty-Four Yoginīs and Saptamātṛkās, had certainly a very important place in the cult hierarchy there. In fact, the Sixty-Four Yoginī temple of Ranipur-Jharial was built on the summit of the enormous outcrop of flat rock that dominates the site, while the two largest shrines dedicated in the *tīrtha* to Viṣṇu and Śiva respectively, i.e., the imposing Indralath and Someśvara temples, were built at the foot of the rock itself. Such a spatial disposition of shrines appears connected with the different natures of the divinities worshipped respectively on the summit and at the foot of the hill: the Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, indeed, contains the terrible Tāntric representations of Śiva and Śakti and was, thus, significantly confined to a less accessible spot, while the temples of Someśvara and Indralath, once frequented by the mass of the devotees, contain the benign and more accessible representations of Śiva and Viṣṇu, to whom all favours could be asked for in accordance with the principles underlying the *bhakti* movement.

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[280] K.V. Soundara Rajan, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1 and 166.

[281] K. N. Mahapatra, 'Gaganaśivācārya and the Date of the Monuments at Rāṇipur-Jhariāl', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. III, No. 2, pp. 72-3.

The Śakti was, in all probability, worshipped at Ranipur-Jharial in a *khākharā* shrine too, presently devoid of any cult image and known as Liyahāri temple. This sanctuary, located near the vast tank lying at the foot of the rock, has an unusually wide portal with three openings. Another miniature *khākharā* shrine is placed near the doorway of the Sixty-Four Yoginī temple. These are the two only specimens of a *khākharā deul* to be found in the territory of the old kingdom of Dakṣiṇa Kośala, since this typically Śākta architectural order was more popular in the coastal provinces of Orissa.[282]

The Sixty-Four Yoginī temple at Ranipur-Jharial is a circular enclosure having an inner diameter almost twice as large as the one at Hirapur *(fig.* 59). The mysterious and intimate atmosphere found at the *pīṭha* of Hirapur, which is especially due to the latter's small size, is, therefore, quite absent here.[283] The temple at Ranipur-Jharial differs from the one at Hirapur also in the groundplan, which in this case does not resemble at all the shape of a *yoni-paṭṭa*, the former temple having no projecting entrance like the latter. Another important difference is the absence, in the Ranipur-Jharial sanctuary, of the Kātyāyanī images being represented, as above indicated, on the outer circular wall of the Hirapur one.

The open-air arena at Ranipur-Jharial is encircled by sixty-four niches for as many *yoginīs*, of which only forty-eight have survived. These *yoginī* figures, carved out of coarse-grained sandstone and not out of fine-grained chlorite like the ones at Hirapur, have been greatly defaced due to weathering effect. Most of them have either two or three pairs of arms and wear a conical head-dress. The attributes they hold and the *mudrās* they display are, with a few exceptions, always the same. Only a few pedestals, unlike the case of Hirapur, have animal mounts or other distinctive motifs carved on them.

The *yoginīs* at Ranipur-Jharial are mostly depicted in one and the same stiff dancing posture with widely spread knees, resembling very much some traditional poses of Oḍissi dance. With reference to the latter iconographic feature, C. Fabri remarks:

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[282] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, p. 184.

[283] C.L. Fabri, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

> Why do all the women dance here? Was dancing part of the esoteric practices carried out, at dead of night (the *Bhaviṣyottara Purāṇa* states that the invocation of the *yoginīs* always takes place at midnight on a new moon day), in these arenas, combined with wine and meat and erotics? That *devadāsīs*, dancing girls attached to Hindu temples, were women of easy virtue who contributed to the prostitution of many religious practices, is widely known and universally accepted. But then, why are none of the women at Hirapur dancing?[284]

Fabri's pregnant questioning, in the present state of indological studies, appears destined to be left unanswered.

It can be said, on the whole, that the *yoginī* figures at Ranipur-Jharial are monotonous, repetitive and lifeless. There is a great contrast between them and the seductive, original and lively *yoginī* figures enshrined at Hirapur. The probable explanation for this, according to C. Fabri, is that the former were the work of some 'provincial' artists lacking of imagination and skill, who were cut off from the mainstream of the flowering art movement of coastal Orissa, while the latter were the product of the great Tāntric art school of the Bhauma-kara kingdom.[285]

The pillared *maṇḍapa* at the centre of the arena of Ranipur-Jharial enshrines a three-headed and eight-armed image of Śiva-Naṭarāja functioning as the presiding Bhairava of this Yoginī temple. The deity is here depicted in the act of performing his mythical dance of destruction, the *tāṇḍava*, on the back of the bull Nandi, beside whom a small image of Gaṇeśa is carved. He is represented *ūrdhvaliṅga* and holds a serpent horizontally above his head with his upper pair of hands while his major right arm crosses his body in *gaja-hasta* (a *mudrā* in which the arm is thrown across the chest simulating the proboscis of an elephant). In the remaining five hands he holds a trident, rosary, cup, *ḍamaru* and *kapāla*.[286]

According to M.T. De Mallmann,[287] this cult icon might represent Mārtaṇḍa Bhairava, the Tāntric deity uniting Śiva and the Sun in one person. Mārtaṇḍa, one of the Ādityas, was anciently considered to be the father of both Manu (man) and Yama (death); he was worshipped as the mortal form of the Sun, born from the lifeless egg (i.e., an ovule) of the Vedic goddess Aditi and, at the same time, as the warranter of the continuity of the cosmic process based on the alternating of birth, death and regeneration.[288] The composite Tāntric divinity Mārtaṇḍa-Bhairava was generally represented as having eight arms and five heads. Also the Naṭarāja image enshrined in the central *maṇḍapa* at Ranipur-Jharial is eight-armed, and it may be even considered to be virtually five-headed, inasmuch as the fourth head can be imagined to be on the back of the relief, while the fifth, as per the Śaivite tradition (see the concept of Śiva-Pañcānana), is the transcendent one, not visible to the mortals. The identification of this image as Mārtaṇḍa-Bhairava, following the opinion of Mrs. De Mallmann, throws a new light on Yoginī cult — or at least on its local ramification in Dakṣiṇa Kośala — and allows one to relate it to some form of a solar cult, in which the Sixty-Four Yoginīs as a whole would represent the solar quadrant, and the central Śiva image, a Tāntric form of the Sun god.

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[284] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[285] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[286] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

[287] M.T. De Mallmann, *Les enseignements iconographiques de l'Agni Purāṇa*, Paris, 1963, pp. 7-8 and 175-7.

It must be noted, in this connection, that the later medieval Tāntric conception of a Yoginī *yantra* is stated by some scholars to imply a definite reference to the cycle of day and night, which is obviously governed by the Sun. Sixty-four *yoginīs* are placed on the outer points of the seven triangles constituting this *yantra*, and these *yoginīs* preside over the thirty *muhūrttas* (portions of time) into which the period of day and night is divided. Each *muhūrtta* is governed by two *yoginīs*, for a total of sixty; with the addition of the two *yoginīs* presiding over the morning dawn and the two presiding over the evening twilight, the traditional total number of sixty-four deities is obtained. According to this explanation, *yoginīs* appear to be divinities governing the revolution of time (*ahorātra*), with its bright and dark aspects of day and night.[289]

A further hypothesis on the type of cult having been established at the *pīṭha* of Ranipur-Jharial may be suggested with reference to the possibility that the broken image of Cāmuṇḍā now inserted in niche # 14 — which, although only its bottom half now exists, is all the same much bigger in size than the other *yoginī* images — was originally placed in the central *maṇḍapa* as the presiding deity of the temple along with the image of her 'consort' Naṭarāja/ Bhairava, which is about the same size.[290] In case such a hypothesis is truthful, the cult pattern having been adopted during the Somavaṁśī period in the Sixty-Four Yoginī temple of Ranipur-Jharial would present some similarity with the one followed during the Bhaumakara period at some Śākta-Tāntric temples located in coastal Orissa, such as, for instance, the Vaitāl Deul at Bhubaneswar. The presiding deity of the latter shrine is, in fact, likewise represented by an image of Cāmuṇḍā accompanied within the sanctum by that of her 'consort' Bhairava and surrounded by the images of the *mātṛkās*, the latter feature resembling somehow the spatial disposition of the *yoginī* images round the central *maṇḍapa* at Ranipur-Jharial.

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288. S. Kramrisch, *op. cit.*, I, p. 44; M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

289. A. Boner and S.R. Sharma, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. XXXII and 133, note on Yoginīs.

290. H.C. Das, 'Religions of Orissa', p. 111; T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

Serpent-goddesses

As discussed in chapter 1, ophiolatry has ever been, and still now is, a very important aspect of religion among the great majority of the non-Āryan peoples of the Indian sub-continent. In this context, the special feature of Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Orissa, having the greatest concentration of tribals in India, was the development, in the course of the medieval period, of a number of serpent-goddess cults of the different religious affiliation, all of them well-suited with the Śākta religious milieu of eastern India. The most popular among such *nāgamātā* (Mother-Serpent) cults was the one dedicated to goddess Manasā, which, in its Sanskritised form, is still today alive in some areas of the said States.

In Bengal, goddess Manasā (Born-of-the-Mind) appears to have been originally worshipped by the lower strata of the society (cowherds, farmers, fishermen) for her asserted magical ability to counteract snake poison; yet, in course of time, she gained popularity among the members of the higher castes too, initially among the female and later on also among the male, including brāhmaṇas. The Sanskritisation of Manasā cult was given a start in Bengal in the ninth-tenth centuries AD, the period of rule of the Pālas, and took at least five centuries to be fully achieved. The *Manasā-maṅgala*s of Beṅgālī literature, a class of narrative poems meant to popularise the Mother-Serpent cult among the upper castes of the Hindu society, show that Manasā was accepted after the thirteenth century AD as a manifestation of Śakti conceived as the serpent-daughter of Śiva. The rapid ascent of this syncretistic form of worship also represented a Brāhmaṇical counter-reaction to the conversion of large sections of the Hindu population of Bengal to Islam, which caused the brāhmaṇas to view local folk cults with an unheard-of-interest. The Beṅgālī brāhmaṇas' purpose was to make such conversions cease by virtue of the absorption of the most popular folk cults, including that of the serpent-goddess Manasā, into the Hindu orthodoxy. In the later medieval epoch the cult of Manasā became so popular in Bengal, that the goddess started being worshipped even by some Muslim communities.[291]

Another determinant factor that stimulated the upper caste Hindus of Bengal to adopt the worship of Manasā was the great fear, diffused in all strata of society, of the ambivalent supernatural faculties attributed to serpent-goddesses in general. In fact, although Manasā was fancied to have the power to prevent her worshippers from being bitten by snakes as well as that to recover those who had already run into this danger, the people also believed that this goddess, if not duly propitiated, might dismiss her curative and regenerative aspect and manifest herself as a merciless punisher, sending poisonous snakes to strike the faithless persons who refused to recognise her supremacy and almightiness. In most cases, as attested in regional or local traditions, the submission of high-caste Hindus to the divine power embodied by Manasā was apparently caused by the panic raised among them by the sudden death of an eminent member of their caste in consequence of the bite of a snake.[292]

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[291] P. K. Maity, *op. cit.*, pp. 48, 185 and 239-40; N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-50.

Like the ambivalent village goddesses,. the *grāma-devatās*, generally associated with various diseases and, at one time, with the power of curing them too, Manasā and the like folk deities, initially assimilated to demons by the orthodox Brāhmaṇical circles,

> might be understood as instigating society's confrontation with the chaotic, demonic, disruptive dimensions of life. . . . They, like the diseases so often associated with them, are unpredictable in their moods. They erupt onto the scene suddenly, always powerfully and undeniably, and usually dangerously. Manasā, the North Indian goddess associated with snakes, strikes suddenly and usually fatally and in so doing violently introduces terrifying chaos into the lives of those who are affected. Suddenly, unmistakably, the fragility of existence is underlined, and the normality of ordered, civilized village is called into question. Similarly, Śītalā and Māriyamman, both of whom are associated with smallpox, remind people that their tightly ordered worlds may be reduced to chaos at any moment. To pay attention to such goddesses, however, is to make one's view of reality less fragile, less prone to being shattered by sudden death.[293]

Manasā's function as the dispenser of Supreme Knowledge (*mahājñāna*), such as she is also regarded by tradition,[294] may be connected with the above-sketched religious conception. In a word, the type of wisdom being conferred by Manasā on her devotees would above all consist in the consciousness of the inevitability of sickness, suffering and death (in this case symbolised by snake bite). In return for one's effort to understand the coexistence of good and bad in life, Manasā, like Śītalā and other ill-giving female deities, bestows on her devotees the grace of relieving their pains, either by providing them with a more realistic, less fragile view of life, or by directly saving their lives, or those of their dear ones, from the fatal consequences of snake bite (like Śītalā and also the *grāma-devatās* do when danger comes from an attack of smallpox or of another disease affecting man to death).[295]

In the Purāṇas Manasā is generally associated with Śiva, although there were also some attempts to associate her with Viṣṇu. In the *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* (Ch. 51) she is called the daughter of Śiva, whereas some popular Beṅgālī ballads narrate that she was fashioned out of the seed of Śiva in the infernal regions (*pātāla*) by an artisan at the service of the

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[292] J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-2.

[293] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-11.

[294] N.K. Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, Varanasi, 1972, p. 221.

[295] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

Nāga king Vāsuki (the Lord of the Pātāla, regarded as Manasā's brother), the seed being placed on a lotus leaf and gliding through the stem down to the underworld. That is why Manasā bears the epithets of Padmāvatī (the Girl-of-the-Lotus) and Pātālakumārī (the Maiden-from-the-Underworld). In a variant to this Purāṇic account it is Vāsuki's mother who picks the seed of Śiva up and then changes it into a wonderful-looking young girl. Manasā is in either case related to earth and the infernal regions, being, thus, conceived as a chthonic deity.[296]

The association of Manasā with Śiva is also evinced by a myth according to which the goddess revived Śiva when the latter drank the terrible *halāhala* poison, emerged from the churning of the Primordial Ocean, by extracting it from the god's throat. This story is, in all evidence, a later re-elaboration of the ancient myth of the Churning of the Ocean (*samudra-manthana*); in this new version of the myth, Manasā was assigned a central role to justify her newly-established relationship with Śiva. After having accomplished her task as the Eliminator-of-Poison (Viṣaharī), Manasā distributed the *halāhala* to snakes and insects, thus, earning the epithet of Viṣadharī (Mistress-of-Poison).[297] The epithets Viṣaharī and Viṣadharī assigned to Manasā are clearly indicative of the ambivalent nature of this deity, who has been always taken to be both the causer and healer of the lethal effects induced in man's body by the bite of certain snakes and insects. Since Śiva, as manifesting himself in the Purāṇas, was worshipped by Hindu peasants and farmers as the Supreme Healer, whose special attribute is a snake (a symbol of the healing power in many cultures of the Ancient World), the autochthonous *nāgamātā* cults of eastern India, after having found a synthesis in the figure of Manasā the 'healer', could but be absorbed into the fold of Śaivism (of course, closely allied with Śāktism, as it was the religious norm in eastern India). An analogous process of Sanskritisation of folk ophiolatry also took place on the Vaiṣṇava side with the gradual penetration of Nāga cult, in this case in the form of the worship of Ananta or Baladeva (originally an agrarian serpent deity), into the theological doctrines upheld by different Vaiṣṇava sects.

The most elaborate mythological synthesis of the contamination of Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism with elements pertaining to Nāga cult is possibly found in the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a Śākta-Vaiṣṇava work composed in between the ninth and fourteenth centuries AD.[298] In this text, Manasā, a Śākta deity, is described as the dear disciple of Śaṅkara (Śiva in auspicious form) and the daughter of the cosmic serpent Ananta (associated with Viṣṇu), who, like the *nāgarāja* Vāsuki, is elsewhere stated to be her brother. The same text recognises Manasā as the mistress of all *nāgas*, who are there said to venerate her most ardently.[299]

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[296] N.K. Bhattasali, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-1; J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 42; M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

[297] P.K. Maity, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-201; M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

[298] W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[299] A. Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

THE CULT OF MANASĀ IN ORISSA

P.K. Maity has categorically denied the existence of Manasā cult in medieval Orissa,[300] despite such a statement is belied by the presence on the territory of the State of a large number of cult icons dating from the ninth century AD onwards, which can be definitely considered to depict Manasā.

Maity's conclusions are partly correct, inasmuch as a system of propitiation of Manasā akin to that prevalent in rural Bengal is not presently traceable in Orissa. Low-caste Beṅgālī women use to worship the goddess in a twig of *siji* (a variety of euphorbia) or a water pot without asking the intervention of a priest, but this is not the case with Oriyā women. This notwithstanding, Manasā is actively worshipped throughout Orissa under different names such as Jāgulei, Mārcikei, Vilāsuṇī, Ambā-Ambālikā, Sāvitrī, etc. She is usually represented by a *nāgamātā* image which, in certain cases, may even depict a Buddhist or Jaina serpent-goddess. Such images are for the most part worshipped in village-goddess shrines, yet they must have originally belonged to no longer extant medieval shrines. Furthermore, an important religious festival dedicated to Manasā in her form as Jāgulei is held in some villages of Orissa in the month of Śrāvaṇa (July-August), the period of the year during which snakes use to come out of their lairs because of heavy rainfalls.

The confusion into which scholars are thrown when dealing with the historical development of Manasā cult in Orissa rises from the fact that during the Bhauma period Brāhmaṇical Hinduism and Tāntric Buddhism were so inseparably mixed up there, that in some cases it is now difficult to ascertain whether a *nāgamātā* image dating back to that period represents the Hindu serpent-goddess Manasā or rather the Mahāyāna Buddhist serpent-goddess Jāṅgulī, whose *dhyāna* was very similar to the former's one. The very name Jāgulei, given by the Oriyā villagers to Manasā (and sometimes to Cāmuṇḍā too), is indicative of the past syncreticism of the two ophidic cults, the one Hindu and the other Buddhist. At any rate, the purpose underlying the propitiation of these two goddesses was basically one and the same, namely, warding snakes off. In all likelihood, medieval Oriyā villagers were not very much concerned with the identity of a *nāgamātā* image having been carved in earlier days: when they resolved to install one such image in a *grāma-devatā* shrine for worship exigencies, had that image been representative of Manasā, of Jāṅgulī or even of Padmāvatī (the most eminent Jaina serpent-goddess), they naturally did it without questioning too much the identity of the deity portrayed by the sculptor, for the religious meaning of this class of cult icons was, as discussed above, one and the same for them. Each of such images, indeed, represents the Mother-Serpent, and as such it was worshipped by the villagers, who knew no sectarian fanaticism.

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[300] P.K. Maity, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-9.

Thus, contrary to the opinion of P.K. Maity, Manasā cult was not unknown or insignificant in medieval Orissa, only it took in this land a different shape from the one that developed in the same period in Bengal. It is not known for a certainty whether the high-caste Hindus of medieval Orissa used to join the folk worshippers of Manasā/Jāgulei in liturgical practices as their Beṅgālī homologues did, yet such a hypothesis must not be far from truth, if one thinks of the great lot of artistically carved medieval images of *nāgamātās* having been recovered from the State. Such pieces of sculpture apparently served as cult images and were originally installed in Hindu temples, the erection of which was invariably patronised by the upper classes. Besides, even though the ruling classes of medieval Orissa needed not to come to a compromise with the lower classes and their folk cults to stem the diffusion of Islam over the country (as their Beṅgālī homolugues were forced to do starting from the thirteenth century AD), yet they were historically inclined to embrace by and large all of the popular forms of cult that rose to eminence in Orissa in course of time. The Śākta cult of Manasā/Jāgulei was certainly one of such folk cults, for which reason its past patronisation by the upper classes of Orissa appears logical in this perspective.

IMAGES OF MANASĀ PROPER

The earliest iconographic form in which the serpent-goddess Manasā, or at any rate a Brāhmaṇical *nāgamātā*, was represented in sculptural art in Orissa derives from the anthropomorphic figures of *nāgas* flanking the doorframes of some of the temples of the seventh-eighth centuries AD with the apparent function of doorkeepers. In fact, like the early *nāga* images carved on either side of the respective main portals of the temples of Svarṇajāleśvara, Śiśireśvara, Vaitāl and Mukteśvara at Bhubaneswar, the Manasā images in question generally depict the goddess as seated in *padmāsana* and holding a pot (*ghaṭa*) or a foliated vase (*pūrṇa-ghaṭa*) in front of her chest with both hands, with the latter feature stressing her role as donor of material prosperity and, at the same time, as the guardian of the spiritual 'treasures' that Hindu mythology places in the nether world. In this class of images, Manasā is invariably depicted with a canopy of serpent hoods (usually seven) forming a nimbus behind her head, a feature which also characterises all of the *nāga* and *nāgī* images carved on the walls of Orissan temples.[301]

The Manasā image from Bisimatri, three-hooded, is the earliest in Orissa. Other very ancient images of this type are found at Tola, Kantapara and Bhilligram in the Prachi Valley (Puri district), at Vatesvara near Salepur (Cuttack district), in the Orissa State Museum (two examples), and in the modern Buddheśvarī temple at Bhubaneswar. Most of these sculptures date from the later Bhauma-kara period (ninth-tenth centuries AD), although some of them are assignable to the Somavaṁśī period (tenth-early twelfth centuries AD). The example from Tola, dating back to *ca.* the tenth century AD, represents a two-armed crowned *nāgamātā* canopied by seven serpent hoods. The image is placed in a modern subsidiary shrine lying within the compound of Rāmeśvara Śiva temple, where it is presently worshipped under the local name of Mārcikei. The example from Kantapara is likewise assignable to *ca.* the tenth century AD. It represents a four-armed *nāgamātā* with seven serpent hoods above her head, holding *akṣamālā* and displaying *abhaya-mudrā* with her major pair of hands. The image has been removed from a ruined temple, of which it was possibly the presiding deity in times past, and is now worshipped in a modern *grāma-devatā* shrine under the local name of Vilāsuṇī. Both at Tola and Kantapara, *Nāga Pañcamī*, the Hindu festival of snakes and serpent deities, is celebrated during the rainy season with the staging of Indian opera plays and folk pantomimes highlighting the *nāgas*' benevolent aspect (which is also personified by Manasā, conceived as the healer from snake-bite, the donor of opulence and the giver of supreme knowledge).[302]

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[301] T.E. Donaldson, 'Nāga Images and the Cult of Manasā in Orissan Art', in B. Bäumer, ed., *Rūpa Pratirūpa: Alice Boner Commemoration Volume*, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 100-2 and 107-8.

At Bhilligram near Bhillideuli, a very beautiful image of Manasā assignable to *ca.* the twelfth century AD is presently worshipped as Jāgulei in a *grāma-devatā* shrine. The goddess is seated in *padmāsana* on a double lotus cushion and holds a *pūrṇa-ghaṭa* in front of her chest with both hands. Her hair is braided in a large chignon on the top of the head, which is crowned and framed by a canopy made of seven serpent hoods.[303] The two specimens of a cult icon of Manasā preserved in the Orissa State Museum have been recovered from Dharmasala in Cuttack district, an ancient centre of Bhauma art. The first of them, dated by the curators of the Museum to the ninth century AD, resembles in every respect the Bhilligram example (of which it may have constituted the prototype), while the second, dated to the tenth century AD, is very similar to the Tola example, from which it solely differs in the pose of the hands, holding a vase each on either side of the goddess' body rather than being folded in front of her chest to hold one vase. The image is, furthermore, framed by a trilobate *toraṇa* (arch) below which is carved a large full-blown lotus issuing from the topmost among the snake hoods forming the usual canopy of seven over the head of the goddess. Some decades back an image of Manasā, perhaps dating from the same epoch of those being discussed here, was installed as the presiding deity in a modern Śākta temple at Bhubaneswar under the name of Buddheśvarī. This new temple was erected for the specific purpose of enshrining the Manasā image at issue, recovered from under the ground after having been laying buried for a long time.

Two more images of a seated *nāgamātā*, both of them resembling to some extent the iconography of Manasā, were brought to light during some excavations conducted at Kenduli on the bank of the river Prachi. They have been subsequently installed as the co-presiding deities of the reconstructed Caṇḍī temple, located at the same site, under the mythological names of Ambā and Ambālikā (probably borrowed from the *Mahābhārata*). It is not known for a certainty whether these cult icons were originally worshipped inside this twelfth-century brick temple at Kenduli. Both deities are seated in *paryaṅka* (a cross-legged pose in which one leg rests upon the other) on a double lotus cushion and are canopied by seven serpent hoods; their pedestals are occupied by kneeling figures (with the addition, in the case of Ambā, of a lion and some wildly dancing figures). Both goddesses have two arms, with which they hold respectively a long-stemmed lotus and either a bunch of mangoes (Ambā) or a large stalk with a ball of seeds (Ambālikā).[304] These two unique Śākta cult icons, very accurately carved in chlorite, can be in neither case identified beyond all doubt with Manasā. Indeed, the image of Ambā might represent the Jaina serpent goddess Padmāvatī (the *śāsana-devatā* or female attendant of the twenty-third *tīrthaṅkara*, Pārśvanātha, he too associated with snakes), while that of Ambālikā might represent Jāṅgulī, the Buddhist counterpart of Manasā (*Pl.* XI).[305] It is a fact, that no other such image of Manasā has been discovered so far on the territory of Orissa. Among other things, the pair of sculptures from Kenduli are also difficult to date: in fact some scholars assign them to the ninth-tenth centuries AD,[306] whereas some others assign them to the eleventh-twelfth centuries AD.[307] Whatever may be the real identities of these ophidic deities, their exquisitely carved images must have played a very important role in Śakti-worship in the Prachi Valley in the middle part of the medieval period. Even admitting that they originally represented Padmāvatī and Jāṅgulī, yet the Hindu folk, who always formed the bulk of the population of the Prachi Valley, may have worshipped them as different aspects of the primordial Mother-Serpent of Hinduism (Manasā), of whom Padmāvatī and Jāṅgulī were the Jaina and Buddhist adaptations respectively.

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[302] P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report 1974-75: Prachi Valley*, pp. 5 and 15; S.C. Panda, *Nāga Cult in Orissa*, Delhi, 1986, pp. 67 and 108.

[303] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1291.

IMAGES OF ĀSTIKAJARATKĀRU AND OF MANASĀ/JARATKĀRU

The second mode of iconic representation of a Mother-Serpent adopted by the medieval Hindu sculptors of Orissa is represented by the so-called Āstikajaratkāru images, formed by the union of the effigy of an ophidic female deity (Jaratkāru) with that of her son (Āstika). This form of a serpent-goddess evolved starting from the ninth-tenth centuries AD, possibly under the influence of the then emerging iconographic association of the *mātṛkās* with babies.[308]

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[304] Id., *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, II, pp. 687-8.

[305] S.C. Panda, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[306] P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report, Vol. I: From 1971 to 1974-75*, p. 12.

[307] T.E. Donaldson, *art. cit.*, p. 687.

[308] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

The cult heroin, in this case, is not Manasā in her full-form (*pūrṇa-rūpa*), but rather a variant form of hers, Jaratkāru, who nevertheless finds mention in such an ancient text as the *Mahābhārata*.

The mythical figures of Jaratkāru and Āstika are the leading characters of a renowned episode contained in the first book of the *Mahābhārata*, that is, the mass-sacrifice of *nāga*s conducted by king Janamejaya, otherwise known as Sarpasattrin (the Sacrificer-of-Snakes). The story relates how this king resolved upon annihilating the whole *nāga* race to avenge the murder of his father Parīkṣita at the hand of the *nāga* king Takṣaka. Accordingly, he erected a sacrificial fire-altar on which, by means of magic charms, innumerable *nāga*s were attracted and instantly burnt alive. Yet, as Takṣaka himself was going to meet his own death, the providential intervention of the *ṛṣi* Āstika (the Orthodox-One) — the *deus ex machina* of the circumstance — obliged Janamejaya to put an end to the holocaust of snakes, thus, saving the *nāga* race by certain extermination. Āstika, sharing in both the nature of a brāhmaṇa and that of a *nāga*, was son of the *ṛṣi* Jaratkāru and of the sister of the *nāga* king Vāsuki, named Jaratkāru like her husband. The youthful *nāgī* Jaratkāru — who, being referred to as the sister of Vāsuki, can be identified with Manasā of the Śaivite tradition — had been given in marriage to the ascetic Jaratkāru by Vāsuki himself after the prophecy made by the god Brahmā, that the offspring of the so-formed couple would have saved the *nāga* race (Āstika's maternal lineage) from violent extinction. After he had completed his mission successfully, Āstika obtained as a boon from the *nāga*s that the recital of his name shall protect men from the dangers coming from serpents. Thus, he not only was the rescuer of the *nāga* race, but also that of human race.[309]

The figure of the *nāgī* Jaratkāru, connected in myths with some of the great serpent kings of the *Mahābhārata*, can be considered an early Sanskritised hypostasis of the *nāgamātā* complex of pre-Vedic India, synthesised in other traditions by the figure of goddess Manasā. It is she, the Mother-Serpent, the real source of the salvific power of immunisation the great epic attributes to her son Āstika. Accordingly, the sculptural representation of Jaratkāru with the child Āstika seated on her lap can be taken to be a variant form of the iconography of Manasā. The cult of Jaratkāru was objectively much more rooted in orthodox Brāhmaṇical Hinduism than the tribal-like cult of Manasā of the Śaiva-Śākta matrix. In other words, the former appears to be a typical Sanskritised expression of serpent-worship as in vogue among the Āryans of the post-Vedic period, while the latter appears to be much more related to non-Āryan, Śākticised forms of ophiolatry, diffused over eastern India from the hoary past. It was, thus, not by chance that the image of Āstikajaratkāru, starting from the Somavaṁśī period, replaced practically everywhere in Orissa the image of Manasā proper: in fact, the epic-Purāṇic (i.e., orthodox) form of Śaivism fostered by the Somavaṁśīs as well as, later on, the syncretistic form of Vaiṣṇavism fostered by the Gaṅgas, could better match with the veneration of an 'epic' *nāgamātā* like Jaratkāru than with that of a 'spurious' *nāgamātā* like Manasā/Jāgulei.

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[309] J.P. Vogel, *Indian Serpent-Lore*, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 66-9, S. C. Panda, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-6.

The usage of installing votive images of Āstikajaratkāru (which were believed to protect their worshippers from snake-bite), in the Śaiva and Śākta shrines of Orissa may have initially drawn inspiration from the South-Indian tradition of *nāgamātā*-worship, for it is known that the worship of Āstikajaratkāru was very popular in the Dravidian countries (whereas it was not popular in Bengal).[310]

The early Āstikajaratkāru images of Orissa depict the goddess as seated in *lalitāsana* (with one leg pendant from the seat) with a small child placed on her left thigh in the *mātṛkā* fashion. In a few cases the child Āstika is replaced by the figure of a snake, which may symbolise the ophidic aspect of Āstika himself (who is actually stated to have belonged to the human stock like his father, a brāhmaṇa). As in the case of the image of Manasā, a canopy of serpent hoods generally frames Jaratkāru's head. The most beautiful among these early Āstikajaratkāru images is the one discovered at Tundara near Bhimpur (Baleswar district). The goddess is here richly bejewelled, has prominent breasts, and holds a cobra in her right hand. Other images belonging to this sub-class are to be found at Vatesvara and at Shergarh. All of these sculptures can be tentatively assigned to the later Bhauma-kara period.[311]

Starting from the twelfth century AD this mode of depicting the Mother-Serpent underwent great changes, chief among which was the progressive transformation of the child placed on the goddess' lap into a full-grown man, apparently lifeless or, in some cases, shown while being revived by the goddess herself (as the posture of his right arm, raised as a sign of return to life, indicates). This male figure being in all evidence a warrior (and not a brāhmaṇa, such as Āstika is reported to have been), the iconographic motif at issue cannot be any longer identified with the Āstikajaratkāru one in a strict sense, although it is generally referred to as such. T.E. Donaldson employs the double form 'Manasā/Jaratkāru' to designate the deity portrayed in this sub-class of images so as to distinguish the later group of images from the earlier one, in which Jaratkāru is represented as a divine Mother with her semi-divine son. In the later iconographic mode emphasis is no longer laid on the auspicious association of the thaumaturgic figures of Jaratkāru and her son Āstika, rather it is laid on the power, attributed by tradition to all *nāgamātās*, to counteract the poison of snakes, a power being esteemed to be so great, that it can even restore life to the deceased (as it is implicit in the iconographic mode under discussion). An element of continuity with the Āstikajaratkāru motif is, at any rate, provided by the motherly attitude displayed by the goddess towards the youth or man placed on her lap. The latter, generally bearded and ornately bejewelled like a kṣatriya, can be one of the royal personages having been reportedly revived by Manasā, of whom medieval Beṅgālī legends and ballads furnish numerous instances. However, the Orissan images of this type do not appear erotic like the Beṅgālī images representing Manasā with a resuscitated prince on her lap; on the contrary, they always appear votive in form and benedictory in purpose.[312]

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[310] S.C. Panda, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

[311] T.E. Donaldson, *art. cit.*, pp. 104-5; S.C. Panda, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-2.

The identification of the goddess represented in the imagery in question with Manasā/Jaratkāru is principally grounded on the depiction of a small rearing snake on their pedestals. On the contrary, the canopy of snakes, always carved behind the goddess' head in the earlier images, is eliminated in most of the later examples, where it is often replaced by a *snuhi* plant, traditionally associated with Manasā cult. The *snuhi* plant (*Euphorbia antiquorum* or *Euphorbia neriifolia*) was sacred to Manasā because of the vomitory, expectorant and purgative properties of its poisonous sap.[313] The *snuhi* symbolism probably hints at Manasā's magical faculty to change poison into a curative substance.

This later iconographic form of Hindu *nāgamātā* was very popular in Orissa from the ninth to the thirteenth century AD.[314] Images of this type have a wide distribution over the coastal plains of the State; most of them are now loosely placed in the premises of a Śaiva temple, although they can be found in the compound of a Śākta temple too. They are met with in profusion inside or near the old Śaiva shrines scattered all over the Prachi Valley, such as the ones at Niali, Pitapara, Adasapur, Mudgala-Madhava, Kakatpur, Gramesvara, Garudipanchana, Budhapada, Kapila Muni Ashram, Kenduli, etc., with this showing the close association of Manasā cult with Śaivism during the Somavaṁśī and early Imperial Gaṅga epochs (to which most of the above-mentioned temples are traced back). In Cuttack district, the Śaiva temple of Trilocaneśvara at Kundesvara (*fig.* 48) and the Śākta one of Kuṭamacaṇḍī at Debidola, besides many others, contain beautiful images showing this iconographic mode, some fine examples of which are also preserved in the Orissa State Museum.

The Śākta-Tāntric nature of some of the cult images of Manasā/Jaratkāru is testified by the depiction on them of a pair of emaciated figures standing on either side of the goddess, in some examples holding a *kapāla* (from which they sometimes drink or eat), or by the presence of an owl (generally associated with Cāmuṇḍā). The former feature is noticed, for instance, in the example preserved in the Jayadeva Cultural Centre, Kenduli (*Pl.* XII) and in the one loosely placed in the Aṅgeśvara Śiva temple compound at Pitapara, both dating from the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. In one example at Mantri, the lion, the celestial mount of both Durgā and Pārvatī, is carved on the pedestal.[315]

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[312] T.E. Donaldson, *art. cit.*, p. 106; S.C. Panda, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

[313] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 291; G. Penso, *Le piante medicinali nell'arte e nella storia*, s.l., 1986, p. 49.

[314] T.E. Donaldson, *art. cit.*, p. 106.

After the thirteenth century AD the cult of Manasā/Jaratkāru, as it was the case with the greater part of the independent Śākta cults of coastal Orissa, declined, or at least was no longer patronised by the dominant classes of the Gaṅga empire. This is demonstrated by the fact that few, if any, Orissan images of Manasā/Jaratkāru are assignable to a period later than the thirteenth century AD.[316]

Pārvatī

Goddess Pārvatī, the divine consort of Śiva, is not properly definable as a Śākta deity. She is, at any rate, the most important deity of the Śaivite pantheon after Śiva himself as well as the chief representative of the female principle in the Śaiva theological perspective. In a land of election of Śaivism allied with Śāktism, such as the Kaliṅga country was from the post-Gupta epoch to the rise to power of the Imperial Gaṅga dynasty, the worship of Pārvatī, the 'consort goddess' *par excellence,* was inseparable from that of Śiva. Consequently, very few separate Śākta shrines for Pārvatī — worshipped in these cases under other names, such as Gaurī, Gopāliṇī, Annapūrṇā, etc. — were established by the monarchs or by the feudal lords of Orissa. Most of such shrines were erected by the Somavaṁśīs, who showed a predilection for the sensual, homely, pacific and nurturing side of Śakti, personified at best by Śiva's spouse Pārvatī.

As a Śaiva divinity, however, Pārvatī always played an important role in the community worship in Orissan temples. Her cult image, like those of Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa, was normally installed as *pārśva-devatā* in one of the main niches of the standard model of Śaiva temple as canonised in the temple art tradition of Orissa starting from the Śailodbhava epoch. The only exception to this standard iconographic project is constituted by the Śaiva temples of the Bhauma-kara period, in which the female *pārśva-devatā* is usually represented by an image of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā.

The only extant sanctuary dedicated to Pārvatī as such in the whole of Orissa is the one erected by the Gaṅgas in the Liṅgarāja temple compound at Bhubaneswar. This shrine was not conceived as an independent seat of Śakti-worship, rather it was made subservient to the syncretistic worship pattern centring round the figure of Harihara (half-Śiva and half-Viṣṇu), which prevailed in the Liṅgarāja temple complex after the establishment of the Gaṅga rule over Bhubaneswar in the twelfth century AD. As suggested in chapter 2, it seems that the preference granted by the Gaṅgas to Vaiṣṇavism (in the form of Jagannātha cult) brought to an end the attempts, made in the preceding centuries by the Śaiva and Śākta devotees of Orissa jointly, to raise Pārvatī cult, an expression of benign Śāktism, to the status of an independent cult closely connected with the mainstream of Śaivism. Therefore, the separate worship of Pārvatī, unlike what happened with Hindu goddesses ascribed with a malignant or ambivalent character such as Durgā, Cāmuṇḍā, Vārāhī, Manasā, the Divine Mothers, the Sixty-Four Yoginīs, the various Ṭhākurāṇīs and *grāma-devatās*, etc., never rose to great eminence in the plains of Orissa, with some significant exceptions represented by a few isolated shrines that will be described later on.

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[315] *Ibid.*, p. 107; Id., *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1081.

[316] Id., *art. cit.*, p. 108.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ICONOGRAPHY OF PĀRVATĪ IN ORISSA

From the iconographic point of view, the image of Pārvatī underwent but few and secondary modifications through the history of Hindu temple art in Orissa. The goddess was in most cases depicted with four arms and in a frontal standing pose,[317] even though one can find in Orissa some sculptural specimens of Pārvatī in a seated pose too, the most beautiful among which are found in the Yameśvara temple at Bhubaneswar and in the Khajūreśvara temple at Shergarh (Baleswar district). Most of the seated images of Pārvatī affixed to the walls of the Śaiva temples of Orissa are carved in subsidiary niches or framed into *caitya* medallions, a feature no doubt indicating their secondary importance in the overall temple sculptural programme.

In the medieval temples of Orissa there are essentially two iconographic forms of a standing Pārvatī, the one earlier, the other later; either form of the goddess is invariably found in the north *pārśva-devatā* niche of the Śaiva temples built before or after the Bhauma period (*ca.* eighth-tenth centuries AD), unless the niche in question is at present empty owing to the theft or destruction of the image previously housed therein. During the Bhauma period, as above stated, the north main niche of Orissan Śaiva temples was usually occupied by a Mahiṣamardinī image.

In the early imagery of Pārvatī, belonging to the Śailodbhava and Bhauma-kara periods (*ca.* seventh-tenth centuries AD), the goddess assumes a stiff and hieratic *samabhaṅga* pose (with her upright body forming no bends apart from those formed by her prominent breasts and loins). A deer and a lion, or alternatively, a pair of deer, are carved on the pedestal (deer is also typically associated with the image of Śiva in South India). Pārvatī's lower right hand generally displays *varada* (the *mudrā* of boon-bestowal) while her lower left holds a small vase (*kuṇḍikā*). The objects held by the goddess in her upper hands are usually an *akṣamālā* (rosary) in the right and a *ketakī* flower in the left. Pārvatī's coiffure, in these early sculptures from Orissa, is usually arranged in matted locks of hair (*jaṭā*) reminding of the hairdo fashion in vogue from time immemorial among the Śaiva ascetics. This iconographic feature was probably meant to lay stress upon the yogic nature of the meditation upon Pārvatī.[318]

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[317] Id., *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, III, p. 1061.

The yogic power embodied by Pārvatī in the outlook of the Pāśupata ascetics, who dominated the scene of Orissan Śaivism in the early medieval period, is also symbolised by the rosary and water pitcher — associated in the all-India context with the image of Śiva, particularly in the Gupta epoch[319] — appearing in most of the early images of this goddess to be found in Orissa. These two objects, in fact, testify to the penance and austerities which Pārvatī, as stated in the Purāṇas, performed in order to win the heart of Śiva, the Supreme Yogin.[320] The *akṣamālā* or *japamālā*, whose beads are traditionally counted out during the utterance of mystic spells (*japa*), was furthermore attributed a magical significance by the followers of the Tantra tradition; in this connection, it is worth noticing that this garland (*mālā*) of beads is stated to be called *akṣa* (meaning a die or big seed) because it symbolises the fifty-one letters of the Sanskrit alphabet from *a* to *kṣa*, used to form all *mantras*.[321] The attribution of a rosary, particularly frequent in the Orissan images of Śiva, of Ardhanārīśvara and, on the Śākta side, of Pārvatī, Durgā, Cāmuṇḍā and Maṅgalā, appears, thus, conceptually related, among other things, to the Tāntric mode of worship resorted to by a Hindu devotee when meditating upon his own elect deity (*iṣṭa-devatā*).

The most noticeable specimens of this sub-class of Pārvatī icons are the ones, serving in each case as the north side deity, found in the very old Śaiva temples of Bhubaneswar known as Svarṇajāleśvara, Mārkaṇḍeśvara and Paścimeśvara (the last one being now in a ruined state). Another image of this type is presently housed in a tiny shrine to the north-east of Liṅgarāja temple. All of the sculptures at issue date back to the seventh or eighth centuries AD (*Pls*. XVII and XXVI).

One of the few deviations from the above-described iconography is represented by the image of Pārvatī housed in the south *pārśva-devatā* niche of the Vaitāl Deul at Bhubaneswar (eighth century AD); the goddess assumes here a less rigid and more gracious posture and holds a trident in her lower right hand rather than displaying *varada* with it as customarily (*fig*. 37). In another peculiar image preserved in the Khiching Museum, dating from the tenth century AD like most of the sculptures found at that site, Pārvatī is six-armed and holds a rosary, trident and *kamaṇḍalu* (a kind of water vessel) as her visible attributes.

The conception of Pārvatī as supreme mistress of *yoga* was further developed in Orissan iconography through her depiction as a comely maiden being engaged in the performance of ascetic austerities (*tapas*). Starting from the tenth century AD the esoteric iconographic motif of Tapasvinī Pārvatī (Pārvatī-the-Ascetic) was introduced into Orissa from central India. One of the earliest images belonging to this sub-class, which may have originally served as *pārśva-devatā* in some collapsed Śaiva temple, is loosely placed against the outer wall of Someśvara temple at Patnagarh in Balangir district (*fig.* 38). The goddess, four-armed, is here depicted as standing on one leg; her major two hands are folded in prayer in front of the abdomen, while the upper two, now broken, supported respectively a Śiva-*liṅga* and a small figure of a pot-bellied deity (possibly representing Gaṇeśa), which are still visible on the upper portion of the backslab. A row of nine heads, probably representing the Nine Planets (Navagrahas), is carved above the goddess' head (now missing).[322]

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[318] *Ibid*., C. Sivaramamurti, *op*. *cit*., p. 59.

[319] C. Sivaramamurti, *op*. *cit*., p. 59.

[320] *Ibid*., p. 65.

[321] P. Pal, *art*. *cit*., p. 1052.

Another esoteric form of Pārvatī, meant to stress upon her unbounded yogic power, was introduced in the course of the eleventh-twelfth centuries AD in the decorative programme of some Śaiva temples of Orissa, although the placement of this type of images in small niches opening on the upper levels of the vertical portion of the *deul* suggests that they were attributed only a secondary importance in the overall worship pattern adopted in such temples. This sub-class of images, called Pañcāgni-tapasyā Pārvatī (Pārvatī-in-Penance-among-Five-Fires), represent the goddess in a standing pose as surrounded by four braziers filled with fire, the fifth fire being understood to be the scorching summer sun shining upon her head (as it is stated in some Purāṇic accounts).[323] This iconographic motif was very common in South India as well.[324]

The second, later mode of representing Pārvatī adopted by the medieval Oriyā sculptors differs from the former as to the posture, the animal mount being carved on the pedestal, the hairdo, and the attributes being placed in the hands of the goddess. This notwithstanding, as already suggested, these later images — which, like the earlier ones, usually represent Pārvatī in a standing frontal pose and with four arms, and were similarly installed, as a rule, in the northern *pārśva-devatā* niche of Śaiva temples — can be considered to be but a more refined iconographic development of the earlier Pārvatī imagery, of which they reproduced the basic features as well as the function in the established worship pattern in vogue at the medieval Śaiva shrines. The substantial conservatism in regard to the evolution of the image of Pārvatī in Orissa was probably due to the fact that this goddess was not an independent Śākta deity like Durgā, Cāmuṇḍā, and other similar female deities associated with Śiva, whose respective iconographic features and cultic functions appear far more varied.

The Pārvatī images belonging to this second sub-class cover chronologically a period ranging from the tenth century AD to the decline of the Kaliṅga School of Art and Architecture

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[322] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, pp. 1061-2.

[323] *Ibid.*, p. 1062.

[324] C. Sivaramamurti, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

(thirteenth-fourteenth centuries AD). They in most cases represent the goddess in a graceful three-bent standing posture (*tribhaṅga*), which was probably imitated from the analogous pose generally assumed by the Mahāyāna Buddhist deities carved by the Bhauma artists of the Assia Hills (Udayagiri, Ratnagiri and Lalitagiri). Also Mahiṣamardinī Durgā was generally portrayed in this pose by the medieval Oriyā sculptors, though the warlike attitude displayed by this goddess is totally in contrast with the peaceful one characterising the image of Pārvatī. Along with the more proportioned modelling of the body, the addition of rich body ornaments, the great skill with which the backslab was carved, and the appearance of a bejewelled tiara on the goddess' head, the replacement of the *samabhaṅga* posture with the *tribhaṅga* one provided the image of Pārvatī with elegance, gentleness and softness previously unknown in the realm of the Hindu sculptural art of Orissa.

In the later images of Pārvatī, starting from about the tenth century AD, the deer (*mṛga*), which had acted as the *vāhana* of the goddess in the earlier examples, was suppressed to be definitively replaced by the lion, a more appropriate celestial mount for the Devī. The lion, however, already figures beside the deer on the pedestal of most of the Pārvatī images dating from the Śailodbhava and the early Bhauma-kara periods. The deer, an archaic symbol of the cyclic renewal of life on account of its periodical horn-casting, was once regarded as the living hypostasis of the rhythms of vegetative growth underlying the eternal process of birth, death and rebirth. In many ancient cultures of the world, the deer was the animal equivalent of the Tree of Life (symbolised by its ramified horns).[325] The iconographic association of one or two deer with the early Orissan imagery of Pārvatī may be connected with the latter's function as a fertility goddess, or better, as the spirit of the vegetable kingdom. As it is well-known, the post-Vedic goddesses Umā and Gaurī, who in course of centuries became identified with Pārvatī, were originally Earth or Corn Mothers associated with crops and waters; they, like Pārvatī herself, were also associated with the nourishing lunar principle termed as Soma, inherent in the life essence of all plants.[326] Deer is a quite appropriate *vāhana* for a goddess endowed with so a strong regenerative power, but yet, with the triumph of Śākta-Tantrism in Orissa in the Bhauma-kara epoch, its place at the foot of Pārvatī was occupied by the lion, Durgā's standard mount as per the old tradition sanctioned by the *Devī-Māhātmya* textual account.

The attributes assigned to Pārvatī in her later Orissan images are the *nāga-pāśa* (a serpent noose, symbolising the constriction of selfish desire), which replaced the *akṣamālā* in the upper right hand, the *aṅkuśa* (a goad for driving elephants, symbolising the control of aggressiveness), which replaced the *ketakī* flower in the upper left, and the lotus, its stalk being held by the goddess and the flower blooming near her shoulder, which replaced the water pitcher in the lower left. The lower right hand, like in the early images, displays *varada*.[327]

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[325] M. Eliade, *Images et symboles. Essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux*, Paris, 1952, p. 216; J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, I, p. 252.

[326] E.A. Payne, *The Śāktas: An Introductory Comparative Study*, Calcutta, 1933, p. 7; V. S. Agrawala, *Sparks from the Vedic Fire*, Varanasi, 1962, p. 50; S. Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, Cambridge, 1970, p. 161; N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 74; B. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 270 and 287; D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

The most beautiful and best preserved images of Pārvatī belonging to this class are respectively installed as *pārśva-devatās* in the Śaiva temples of Trilocaneśvara at Kundesvara (Cuttack district), of Maṇināgeśvara at Bardhanpur (Baleswar district), of Buddhanātha at Garudipanchana near Bhubaneswar, and of Caṇḍeśvara at Tangi near Chilika Lake. All of these images are carved out of chlorite schist and date from a period ranging from the eleventh to the thirteenth century AD (*Pl.* XIV and *fig.* 39).

The image of Pārvatī acting as the north side deity of Liṅgarāja temple at Bhubaneswar (which is probably a later addition to the iconographic project of that eleventh-century temple) is notable for its large dimensions and for the great artistic skill with which the details of the drapery and ornamentation adorning the goddess' body have been carved out of chlorite schist. Like in other Pārvatī images dating back to the Somavaṁśī and Imperial Gaṅga periods, the backslab of this marvellous piece of sculpture is decorated with figures of flying nymphs and divine musicians who surround the goddess in a heavenly dance.[328]

A deviation from this iconographic standard is constituted by the four-armed image of Pārvatī acting as the presiding deity of Gaurī temple at Bhubaneswar (tenth century AD).[329] Though in this cult icon the Devī holds *nāga-pāśa* and *aṅkuśa* with its upper pair of hands as it was the norm in the later Pārvatī images, yet the objects held in its major hands are, quite unusually, a mirror (*darpaṇa*) in the left and a small cosmetic-stick in vogue among the Hindu married women to mark their heads with vermilion (*sindūra*) in the right. The last two attributes, respectively indicating the Goddess' perfect beauty reflecting in itself and her happy state of enjoying her husband's protection (like any other Hindu woman marked with vermilion does), are noticed in this Pārvatī image only. A pair of deer and a lion lie at Gaurī's foot, being respectively placed on the left and right side of her double lotus pedestal. The goddess is here three-eyed like Śiva.

THE CULTS OF GAURĪ, BHUVANEŚVARĪ AND ANNAPŪRṆĀ IN ORISSA

The temple of goddess Gaurī at Bhubaneswar, probably erected by a Somavaṁśī king, is a specimen of the *khākharā* order, employed by the early medieval Oriyā architects to build the shrines consecrated to Śakti cult (*fig.* 52). Its decorative programme is dominated by female figures, erotic motifs and lotus symbols. During the Somavaṁśī period, this shrine must have been the most popular seat of Devī-worship in Bhubaneswar town prior to the construction of the *khākharā* shrine dedicated to Bhuvaneśvarī in the Liṅgarāja temple compound (early twelfth century AD). The establishment of a shrine dedicated to Gaurī marked a turning point in the development of Śakti cult at Ekāmra *kṣetra* (Bhubaneswar); in fact, the Śākta shrines built in this town during the Bhauma age, such as the Vaitāl and Mohinī temples, have goddess Cāmuṇḍā — the most terrific among the manifestations of the Devī — as their presiding deity, while all of the Śākta shrines having been built there since the time of erection of Gaurī temple onwards are presided over by an image of the Devī in pacific form.[330]

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[327] T.E. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 1061.

[328] M.M. Ganguly, *op. cit.*, pp. 346-7; K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

[329] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, pp. 291-2.

Goddess Gaurī (known as Gourī in Orissa), whose name can be translated as the Fair-One, the Bright-One, or also as the Gold-Complexioned-One, is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as a goddess of crops whose abode is located in the South Hills. At the time of composition of the great epic she had not been yet identified with Umā-Pārvatī, that is, with the consort of Śiva, rather she was sometimes regarded as a form of the goddess of liquor Vāruṇī or Varuṇānī, the wife of the Vedic god Varuṇa.[331] In course of time, Gaurī's benign, lunar, vitalising and nourishing features caused her identification with Umā Haimavatī or Pārvatī, the partner of Śiva's amorous aspect, the personification of female beauty and voluptuousness, the mild and homely form of Śakti, the beneficent protectress of mankind. In the *Vāmana* and *Skanda* Purāṇas Pārvatī is stated to have won the appellation of Gaurī after she had attained a light complexion through the performance of ascetic austerities in reply to an insult from Śiva, who, with reference to her original dark skin, had facetiously called her Kālī (the Black).[332] Gaurī is, therefore, the purest and most austere form of Pārvatī, the Mistress of Yoga (Yogeśvarī), the principle of integration of the values of asceticism and renunciation into the mundane society. She is the perfect symbol of the practice of *bhakti-yoga*, the devotional activity based on self-mortification and renouncement to any pleasure, which aims at 'winning the earth' of one's elect deity (the same way as Pārvatī won Śiva's heart by undertaking *tapas*). As a possible evidence of this, a series of Tāntric festivals celebrated in Orissa during the month of Caitra (March-April), all of them involving different practices of self-injury, rigorous fasts and vows, are presided over by Śiva and Gaurī jointly. Fasting as a sign of devotion to Gaurī on each Tuesday is a very common religious practice among the Oriyās.

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[330] K.C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, pp. 232-3.

[331] A. Danielou, *op. cit.*, p. 121; J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. Veda e antico Induismo*, Milano, 1981, p. 337.

[332] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 119; W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, pp. 268 ff.

The cult of Pārvatī/Gaurī, fostered by the Somavaṁśī monarchs as the chief form of Devī-worship in Ekāmra *kṣetra*, had all the potentialities to spread over the coastal regions of the Kaliṅgan kingdom as an independent Śākta cult — a status it never reached in any part of India. Yet, the general decline of Śākta cults in Orissa, progressively overwhelmed by the *bhakti* movement of Vaiṣṇavism supported by the Imperial Gaṅga dynasty starting from the twelfth century AD, brought about a change in the developmental process in the allied Śaiva-Śākta faiths.

The *nāga-pāśa* and the *aṅkuśa*, associated with the Orissan iconography of Pārvatī starting from the tenth century AD, approximate the goddess' later imagery to the canonical iconography of Bhuvaneśvarī, a Tāntric, but yet benign form of the Devī whose worship gained ascendancy in Orissa starting from about the eleventh-twelfth centuries AD. The only relevant difference between the images of the two deities regards the major left hand, which in the Pārvatī icons under discussion holds a lotus stalk while in the iconography of Bhuvaneśvarī as fixed in the *Bhuvaneśvarī Tantra* it should display *abhaya-mudrā*.[333] It may be concluded that, by the beginning of the Somavaṁśī period, the Purāṇic-Āgamic goddess Pārvatī had been assimilated by the Śaivas of Orissa to the benign Tāntric goddess Bhuvaneśvarī, as is evinced by the standardisation of the images of the two goddesses into one iconographic form.

.Bhuvaneśvarī, the Lady-of-the-Spheres, is one of the Ten Mahāvidyās of the Tantra tradition, of whom she represents the non-fearful aspect. She is stated to rule over the constant evolving of creation, being conceived as the transcendent form of nature (*prakṛti*) and its inherent power of delusion (*māyā*). Inasmuch as she shapes, feeds and protects the cosmic manifestation, Bhuvaneśvarī embodies the totality of the transcendent knowledge sustaining the universe. She is accordingly worshipped as the Power-of-Knowledge (*jñāna-śakti*), the same way as goddess Sarasvatī.[334] Her name also resembles the epithets Jaganmātā (Mother-of-the-World) and Jagaddhātrī (Sustainer-of-the-World), usually referred to Pārvatī. According to the opinion of A. Bharati, Bhuvaneśvarī was once the tutelary deity of the monarchs of Orissa.[335] The Sūryavaṁśī emperor Puruṣottamadeva (AD 1467-97) is, indeed, credited with the composition of a small literary work entitled *Bhuvaneśvarī Pūjāpallava*, written in praise of his tutelary deity Bhuvaneśvarī.[336]

The shrine of goddess Bhuvaneśvarī (or Gopāliṇī), situated in the Liṅgarāja premises to the north of the main temple, is an important Śākta *pīṭha* of Orissa. As earlier indicated, the presiding goddess of this *pīṭha* is mentioned as Kīrttimatī in the list of one hundred-eight Śākta *pīṭhas* appended to the *Matsya Purāṇa.*[337] As already referred in chapter 2, it is not known whether this twelfth-century shrine, built by employing the typically Śākta-Tāntric *khākharā* order like the coeval shrine dedicated to goddess Sāvitrī on the opposite side of the Liṅgarāja temple compound, was erected by the last Somavaṁśī kings or by the first members of the Imperial Gaṅga dynasty. The presiding deity of the temple is a crudely carved female figure that has replaced the original one. However, since this cult icon conforms to the canonical iconography of goddess Bhuvaneśvarī, it can be inferred that also the original presiding deity of the temple did so. The *pārśva-devatās* of the temple are different forms of a two-armed Pārvatī, all of them belonging to the original structure.[338] The identification of the figures of Bhuvaneśvarī and Pārvatī in the cult pattern followed at the Liṅgarāja is also testified by the traditional use of the epithets Gaurī and Gopālinī for the worship of the presiding deity of Bhuvaneśvarī temple; in fact, as mentioned in chapter 2, Gopālinī (the Cowerdhess) is a name of Pārvatī or Gaurī as a demon-slayer, found in a number of Orissan myths, chief among which is the one relating to the annihilation of the demons Kīrtti and Vāsa at the hand of the Goddess.

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[333] A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

[334] *Ibid.*, pp. 255, 265, 270, 279-80, 282 and 342.

[335] A. Bharati, *The Tāntric Tradition*, London, 1965, p. 334.

[336] *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts of Orissa*, vol. V: Tantra Manuscripts, compiled by M.P. Dash, p. XLIX.

In the opinion of K.C. Mishra,[339] the worship of Bhuvaneśvarī, of the Tāntric type, was incorporated into the medieval Harihara cult to content the Śāktas, possibly under the inspiration of Śaṅkarācārya (*ca.* AD 788-820). Thus, the presence in the Liṅgarāja temple complex of a shrine dedicated to goddess Bhuvaneśvarī would have been motivated by a tradition having been established in former times in relation to the cult of Harihara. It appears very likely that the erection of Bhuvaneśvarī temple accompanied the process of transformation of the deity worshipped as Liṅgarāja from Śiva Kīrttivāseśvara to Harihara form. The Gaṅga monarchs completed the work of assimilation of Śakti cult into Harihara cult with building an imposing temple for Pārvatī on the north side of the main sanctuary of the Liṅgarāja complex.

The worship of Bhuvaneśvarī with Tāntric *mantras* was also introduced into the Jagannātha temple complex of Puri. The goddess was, in this case, identified with Subhadrā, the younger sister of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma who forms an integral part of the Jagannātha Trinity. Subhadrā is, in fact, daily worshipped by the priests of the temple according to the Bhuvaneśvarī *mantra*, which is also used for the worship of goddess Gopālinī in the Liṅgarāja complex.[340] Moreover, on the occasion of the *Snāna Yātrā* (bathing festival) of Jagannātha at

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[337] V.S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa — A Study*, p. 105.

[338] D. Mitra, *art. cit.*, p. 16 and ns. 1 and 2.

[339] K.C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

[340] *Ibid.*

Puri, Subhadrā is temporarily represented by a painting which depicts goddess Bhuvaneśvarī in its classic form.[341]

The interplay of all the aforesaid benign female deities — i.e., Pārvatī, Gaurī, Gopālinī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Subhadrā — from the twelfth century AD onwards was a consequence of the syncretistic religious policy undertaken by the Gaṅga monarchs, who strove to smooth away the differences between the goddess-cults allied with Śaivism and those allied with Vaiṣṇavism. Owing to the irresistible ascent of Vaiṣṇavism in Orissa in the Gaṅga epoch, Pārvatī herself, formerly venerated as a yogic deity in the Pāśupata-dominated phase of Orissan Śaivism, and thereafter as the sensual partner of Śiva's erotic play in the subsequent, Kaula-dominated phase, lost many of her genuinely Śaiva-Śākta features and became very similar in essence to Lakṣmī, the female deity presiding over wealth and prosperity conceived as the consort of Viṣṇu as well as, in Orissa, of Lord Jagannātha.

Summing up, when, in the thirteenth century AD,[342] the Gaṅgas erected a great and magnificent temple for Pārvatī — the only one in Orissa — in the Liṅgarāja temple compound in order to show their religious catholicity (*fig.* 55), this goddess had already lost her potential-in-waiting as a cult heroine by full right on the Śaiva side of Orissan Hinduism, and was above all venerated as a fertility goddess in accordance with the patriarchal views upheld by the Vaiṣṇavas. She had become, in a word, a sort of second Lakṣmī, of whom she reproduced the food-giving and crop-bestowing qualities within the Śaiva fold. The Devī image enshrined in the sanctum of Pārvatī temple is, in fact, worshipped as Annapūrṇā, a name that can be translated as 'Giver-of-Food-and-Plenty' or also as 'Full-of-Nourishment'. This form of the Goddess is worshipped elsewhere in India for her power of giving plentiful crops and protecting from the want of food, a power that is none the less attributed to Lakṣmī of the Vaiṣṇavas as well. The conception underlying either the worship of Lakṣmī and that of Annapūrṇā is one and the same, and has little to do with the allied Śiva-Śakti cults as they had historically developed in Orissa in the centuries preceding the rise to power of the Gaṅga dynasty. Indeed, the cult of Annapūrṇā, like that of Lakṣmī, is essentially a domestic fertility cult, devoid of esoteric or sapiential connotations. The best evidence of this is the cult icon placed in the sanctum of Pārvatī temple at Bhubaneswar, representing a two-armed goddess holding a lotus stalk in her left hand and a pot of gems in her right. She is seated in *lalitāsana* on a double lotus cushion, has a lion as her *vāhana*, and wears a tall conical coiffure adorned with gems (*kirīṭa-mukuṭa*).[343] According to B.V. Nath,[344] this cult icon conforms to the iconography of Saubhāgya-Bhuvaneśvarī, the divine dispenser of good luck, this being an appropriate epithet for Annapūrṇā and Lakṣmī rather than for Pārvatī as such.

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[341] D.N. Pathy, 'Orissan Painting', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 227.

[342] B.V. Nath, 'The Pārvatī Temple Inscription at Bhubaneswar', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. III, No. 3, pp. 146-9.

[343] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, II, pp. 576-7.

[344] B.V. Nath, *art. cit.*, pp. 146-9.

It can be, thus, maintained that the worship of Pārvatī in different iconographic forms and under different appellations has a long and uninterrupted history in Orissa and is still nowadays prevalent in the State, especially among the Hindu devotees of the Śaiva-Śākta affiliation. Being a benign manifestation of *dakṣiṇācāra* Śāktism, starting from the Gaṅga period Pārvatī was also accepted by the devotees of Śrī Jagannātha as an important goddess. In her manifestation as Gaurī she is now dear to the Oriyā people of all caste and creed.

Śrī-Lakṣmī

The benevolent goddess Lakṣmī, one of the most popular divinities, is held in high esteem in the Hindu world as the deity of beauty, fortune, fertility and plenty. It is but natural on the part of the people to propitiate her for material prosperity, which is one of the most essential major goals of life. She has many names such as Padmā, Padmālayā, Kamalā, Śrī, Haripriyā, Lokamātā, Dugdhādhitanayā, Kṣīrasāgarasutā, Indirā, Bhārgavī, Kṣīrābdhitanayā, Rāmā, Jaladhijā, Hariballabhā, Mā, many of her appellations signifying her association with the consort Viṣṇu.

> Though in the past, like Durgā, she was sometimes worshipped in terrible forms she is now-a-days looked on as altogether benevolent, a mother goddess without the awesome power of Durgā, but with no terrifying aspects a goddess to be loved rather than feared.[345]

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

The origin of Lakṣmī cult is tentatively traced from the civilization of the Indus Valley, from where were recovered some deities of terracotta decked with various ornaments, identified by E. MacKay as forms of a 'mother goddess'.[346] An interesting seal unearthed at Harappa depicts a female deity with a sprout issuing from her womb, which feature may indicate she was a deity of fertility.[347] Another seal, recovered from Mohenjo-Daro, depicts a nude goddess with long hair and three horns (or two horns with a branch of leaves or a feather in the middle) standing in between the two branches of a tree. This surprisingly reminds of one of the variant forms of the later Buddhist iconography of Lakṣmī, in which the goddess is represented as standing on the pericarp of a lotus with lotus flowers and leaves issuing from long stalks flanking her on either side.[348]

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[345] U.N. Dhal, *Goddess Lakṣmī: Origin and Development*, New Delhi, 1978, p. V.

[346] E. MacKay, *Early Indus Civilization*, London, 1948, p. 52.

[347] J. Marshall, ed., *op. cit.*, I, p. 53.

[348] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 168 and n. 2.

Lakṣmī was conceived as Śrī (a term meaning ruling power, beauty, luster, glory, majesty, etc.) from the Vedic period; particularly in the *Śrī-sūkta,*[349] she is the goddess of all living beings, associated with corn. In the *Khila-sūkta* the goddess is said to be of golden complexion, wearing a garland made of silver and as fickle as the deer.[350] In the *Atharvaveda* and *Brāhmaṇa* literature the concept about this deity is more clear; she is conceived in these texts as the sister of the gods and is connected with such terms as *rāṣṭra* (kingdom, nation), *kṣatra* (ruling power), *prajā* (offspring), *anna* (food), etc.[351] The story of Śrīdevī's origin is very interestingly recorded in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.*[352] The story runs that when Brahmā-Prajāpati was deeply engaged in meditation, goddess Śrī, endowed with heavenly beauty, glamour and elegance, was born from his body. The other gods were envious of her incomparable splendour and plotted to take all her qualities. Prajāpati requested them that they should not kill his mind-born daughter, but she became none the less ugly, weak and powerless. On the advice of Prajāpati she propitiated the gods and got back her lost qualities and the old appearance with more lustre. She then became an emanation of all good virtues required by the gods and human beings.

The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* and *Vājasaneyi Saṁhitā* mention Śrī and Lakṣmī as two separate identities. No difference whatsoever is, however, noticed between Śrī and Lakṣmī in the *Śrī-sūkta*, a late supplement of the *Ṛgveda* in which the deity is addressed to with different epithets (in most cases relating to her main symbol, the lotus flower) such as Padminī (the One-Possessed-of-the-Lotus), Padmasambhavā (the Lotus-Born), Padmākṣī (the Lotus-Eyed), Padmaurū (the One-Having-Lotus-Thigh), Padmānanā (the Lotus-Faced), Sarasijanilayā (the One-Living-in-the-Lotus-Pond), Padmapriyā (the One-Fond-of-Lotus) and Hastinādapramodinī (the One-Delighted-in-Trumpeting-of-Elephants). Decked with ornaments of gold and silver, she is here described as the deity of splendour bestowing fame (*kīrtti*) and success (*ṛddhi*) and granting prosperity, long life, health and offspring to her devotees.[353]

In the epics the concept about Śrī-Lakṣmī is more clear compared to the earlier concept. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Lakṣmī and Śrī are depicted as two different goddesses. When Rāvaṇa saw Sītā for the first time he described her as 'lotus like Śrī and Padminī'. Sītā is compared with Śrī and Lakṣmī separately. In the version given in the *Mahābhārata*, Lakṣmī sprang up seated on a lotus throne with nectar from the Churning of the Ocean, radiating her splendour to all directions.[354] She was anointed by heavenly elephants pouring water from the *pūrṇa-kalaśa* (the Vase of Plenty). The gods decked her profusely with ornaments and lotuses, thus, stressing her connection with the water element. This ritual bath, a sort of 'baptism' or 'second birth' through the purificatory action of heavenly waters poured by cloud-elephants and blessed by all the gods, makes Lakṣmī — the epiphany of the primordial waters which nourish all forms of life — the personification of the active power of supreme consciousness, a role that was attributed to her especially by the Buddhists.[355] In some other passages of the *Mahābhārata* she is described as the consort of Kubera, the lord and custodian of riches. Thus, her ideological connection with Kubera is understandable. The epics also mention another female manifestation born from the Churning of the Ocean, called Alakṣmī, having an inauspicious character opposite of Lakṣmī's, and indicate that Lakṣmī came to the *devas* and Alakṣmī to the *asuras*.[356]

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[349] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 170-1.

[350] H.N. Bhattacharya, *Hinduder Devadevī*, Calcutta, 1980, III, pp. 60-1 (in Beṅgālī).

[351] U.N. Dhal, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-4.

[352] H.N. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

[353] B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

[354] K.M. Ganguli, tr., *Mahābhārata*, Calcutta, 1927, 32.1.110-11.

The story about Lakṣmī's origin recorded in the *Mahābhārata* was accepted by the writers of the Purāṇas, who furthermore incorporated other interesting mythical elements in dealing with the origin of the goddess. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* enhances the importance of Śrī to a great extent. The story in this Purāṇa runs that the sage Durvāsas offered a garland of *santānaka* flowers to the god Indra, who, attaching no importance to the garland, placed it on his mount the elephant Airāvata; the latter, out of ignorance, threw it away. Durvāsas got angry at this incident and, thus, cursed Indra that Śrī would disappear from the three worlds. This Śrī did, creating havoc in the universe. The sun and the moon lost their radiance, the gods lost their energy and strength and were, thus, humiliated at the hands of the demons. At such a critical juncture Viṣṇu advised the gods to recover the lost Śrī by churning the ocean. From this Lakṣmī appeared as the last object of adoration, seated on a full-blown lotus, holding a lotus in her hand and beaming forth her radiance and beauty.[357]

Other Purāṇas like the *Bhāgavata*[358] and the *Viṣṇudharmottara*[359] speak of Lakṣmī emerging from the churning of the ocean. The *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*[360] mentions in a different way the origin of Lakṣmī, tracing it from the left part of the body of Kṛṣṇa. She is there described as extremely beautiful and of golden colour. Her limbs are warm in winter and cold in summer. She has hard and bulging breasts and big lips. She is ever youthful, her refulgence excelling the radiance of ten million full moons of the autumn. According to Viṣṇu's wishes she appeared in two forms equal in beauty, colour, refulgence, age, dress, qualities, virtues, smile and voice. These two manifestations came to be known as Lakṣmī and Rādhikā respectively. Lakṣmī was associated with Viṣṇu and Rādhikā (or Rādhā) with Kṛṣṇa.

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[355] J. Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-9.

[356] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

[357] P. Tarkaratna, ed., *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 1 and 9 ff.

[358] P. Ramteja Sastri, ed., *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Varanasi, 1963, 8.5.12-15.

[359] *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, Sri Venkatesvara Press, Bombay, 1913, pp. 40-2.

[360] *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* in N.N. Vasu's *Viśvakoṣa*, vol. XVII, p. 129.

In the course of her evolution the figure of Lakṣmī was associated with various gods such as Indra, Kubera, and finally with Viṣṇu. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*[361] relates that she dwells in Viṣṇu's breasts and functions like him with equal status. She became his consort in his different manifestations: she was Padmā when Viṣṇu appeared as one of the Ādityas, Dhāraṇī in his incarnation as Paraśurāma, Sītā in his incarnation as Rāmacandra, Rukmiṇī in his incarnation as Kṛṣṇa, and Lakṣmī in his incarnation as Nṛsiṁha. In this way she was elevated to a very high status in the Vaiṣṇava pantheon.

FORMS OF LAKṢMĪ

In the Purāṇas and Tantras one comes across various aspects of the goddess like Śrī, Kamalā, Gaja-Lakṣmī, Mahālakṣmī, Siddhalakṣmī, Yuddhalakṣmī. Śrī is four-armed, holding *pāśa*, *aṅkuśa*, *akṣamālā* and *padma*; she is described as the mother of the three worlds, white-complexioned, extremely beautiful and decked with various splendid ornaments.[362] Kamalā's features, as conceived in the *Tantrasāra*,[363] are similar or equal to those of Gaja-Lakṣmī. She is, thus, golden-complexioned and is anointed with nectar sprinkled by four elephants as big as the Himālaya mountain. She holds lotuses in her upraised hands while her lower hands are in the poses of *varada* and *abhaya* respectively. She is adorned with a *mukuṭa* of jewels and with drapery and is seated on a lotus. Gaja-Lakṣmī, as described in the *Matsya Purāṇa*,[364] is two-armed, holding *śrīphala* (a coconut) and *padma* in her two hands. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* describes the same form of the goddess as four-armed, seated on a lotus pericarp and holding a lotus stalk in her right hand and a pot full of nectar in the left, with a *śaṅkha* (conch) and a *vilva* fruit in the remaining two hands. Two elephants, one on each side of her head, sprinkle water on the deity from a pot being presented by celestial maidens.[365] According to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*,[366] Sarvalakamaheśvarī Lakṣmī appeared from the churning of the ocean, after which the Ganges and other holy rivers came and bathed her. Two elephants are depicted in the pose of bathing her with water from the golden pitcher. This form is also known as Śubhalakṣmī.

As the radiant goddess emerging, like an angel, from the abyss of the Cosmic Ocean (made of the liquid vital substance from which all the elements of the universe are originated and into which they are destined to be finally reabsorbed), the divinity of the lotus (a symbol of the purity and the spontaneous fecundity of vegetative life), Lakṣmī is the active power (*śakti*) of the divine will (Viṣṇu) that generates again and again the phenomenal world. She is the mother of the universe, the pure goddess of nature, the radiance of the power inherent in the lotus (the symbolical matrix of the whole universe). In many Purāṇic narratives, indeed, Śrī-Lakṣmī is conceived as the personification of the lotus flower which, during the cosmic sleep of Viṣṇu, supports Brahmā, the creator of the universe. The lotus symbolises the manifested universe and its purity. The elephants bathing her with heavenly waters are the symbols of celestial clouds, blessed by the gods and bringing rains, fertility, life and plenty.[367] In the words of A.K. Coomaraswamy,

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[361] *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, pp. 40-2.

[362] H.N. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[363] P. Tarkaratna, ed., *Tantrasāra*, Calcutta, s.d., p. 220.

[364] R.P. Tripathy Sastri, tr., *Matsya Purāṇa*, Prayāg, s.d., 261. 40 (in Hindī).

[365] B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

[366] H.N. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

> The fundamental conception as expressed in later Vedic literature and in the early iconography is that the waters are the support, both ultimate and physical, of all life.[368]

The Mahālakṣmī manifestation is very popular in Purāṇic and Tāntric texts. In her iconographic conception she is clearly associated with Śiva. This militant form of Lakṣmī, endowed with weapons, is conceived in the *Devī-Māhātmya* as the chief transcendent form of the great Goddess, whereas the other two, Mahāsarasvatī and Mahākālī, are said to be subordinated to her.[369] In the *Kūrma Purāṇa* Mahālakṣmī is described as three-eyed, holding a trident and attended by *śaktis*.[370] In the account found in the *Agni Purāṇa* the goddess is portrayed in her most terrific appearance. She is four-faced with a human being, horse, buffalo and elephant being respectively swallowed by her four mouths. She is three-eyed and ten-armed, holding in her right hands a book, sword, *ḍamaru*, etc., and in her left ones a bell, *khetaka*, *khaṭvāṅga* and trident. She is also termed as Siddha Cāmuṇḍā and is consequently conceived as the energy of Rudra-Śiva. As the bestower of *siddhi*, she is Lakṣmī. As holding the book, she is Sarasvatī. Thus, Lakṣmī is here conceived as the consort of Mahādeva and as having similarity with Śivānī and Durgā.[371]

At a particular point of time, possibly towards the end of the Purāṇic period, both the emanations of Śrī and Lakṣmī were amalgamated and came since then on to be known only as Lakṣmī, the most popular term to designate this deity. Śrī-Lakṣmī, originally an independent goddess, underwent several vicissitudes assimilating both non-Āryan and Āryan traits in the course of her evolution, and came finally to be associated with Viṣṇu, probably in the Gupta age. With the rise of Tantrism in the late Kuṣāṇa or early Gupta period, she was conceived as the *śakti* of Viṣṇu, in which capacity she played a formidable role in the post-Gupta theological speculations of the Pañcarātra Vaiṣṇavas.[372]

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[367] H. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, edn., Princeton, 1960, I, p. 165; J. Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 238 and 244.

[368] A.K. Coomaraswamy, 'Early Indian Iconography', *Eastern Art*, 1928, p. 278.

[369] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 496.

[370] H.N. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

[371] P. Tarkaratna, ed., *Agni Purāṇa*, Calcutta, s.d., 307. 13 (in Beṅgālī).

The iconographic representation of Lakṣmī in Gaja-Lakṣmī form is marked in the early centuries of the Christian era. The Buddhist relieves of Gaja-Lakṣmī in the *stūpas* and other monuments of Sanchi, Bharhut, Bodhgaya, Amaravati, etc., and the Jaina ones in the rock-cut caves of Khandagiri hill (lying in the Bhubaneswar area) are the earliest remains of this type brought to light so far.[373] Thus, the goddess in Gaja-Lakṣmī form came to be depicted in sculpture, either in a seated or in a standing pose, on a lotus between two elephants, each standing on either side while pouring water from a *kalaśa* on her head. The Gaja-Lakṣmī motif is depicted on Indian coins starting from the third century BC.[374] From about the second century BC the depiction of this deity on coins, seals, terracottas and stone gateways became a common feature.

In the Kuṣāṇa period Lakṣmī became a favourite goddess, as illustrated by the sculptural remains of the Mathura art (wherein she is sometimes represented with Kubera, the god of riches and overlord of *yakṣas*). Śrī-Lakṣmī and Gaja-Lakṣmī were also the favourite female deities of the Guptas, as evinced by their depiction on some gold coins dating from the Gupta period. Two gold coins of Samudragupta from Orissa (one from Lalitagiri, now preserved in the Orissa State Museum, and the other in a private collection at Khallikote) bespeak of the popularity and diffusion of the goddess in the peripheral areas of the Gupta empire. The association of *yakṣas* with Lakṣmī is noticed in the Gupta seals. The association of Lakṣmī with Viṣṇu was emphasised by the Guptas as seen in the Sarnath stone inscription of Prakārāditya which describes Viṣṇu as the abode of Lakṣmī and Śrī as the consort of Vāsudeva. The Junagarh inscription of Skandagupta and the Gwalior inscription of Mihirakula speak of the popularity of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī. The sculptural representation of Lakṣmī with Viṣṇu on the coils of the serpent Śeṣa (or Ananta) with Lakṣmī seated at her consort's feet while massaging his legs started from the Gupta period.[375]

The sculptural depiction of the goddess in her Gaja-Lakṣmī form, which was profusely highlighted by the Guptas, became in the medieval period a regular feature in Hindu temple architecture. Gaja-Lakṣmī is essentially a peaceful and auspicious deity, with her benign and smiling presence on the door lintel warding off all adverse influences that may approach the temple. Here she stands as a symbol of prosperity, auspiciousness and sacredness.

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[372] H.C. Das, 'Iconography of Śākta Divinities', unpiblished manuscript.

[373] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p.375; B. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

[374] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

[375] H.C. Das, Iconography of Śākta Divinities', unpublished manuscript.

GAJA-LAKṢMĪ IN THE TEMPLE ART OF ORISSA

The earliest representation of Lakṣmī in sculptural form in the cave architecture of Khandagiri (at Bhubaneswar) has already been referred to above. The depiction of this deity in the Hindu temple art of Orissa starting from the seventh century AD is discussed here as far as possible chronologically to give an idea of her eminence as a benevolent manifestation of Śakti. The ancient sculptural motif of Gaja-Lakṣmī as developed in Buddhistic art (*Pl.* XXXIII) was continuously reproduced by the Hindu artists of Orissa, and is still today very popular there. The horizontal lintel of the standard Orissan temple always bears the Gaja-Lakṣmī motif as a sign of auspiciousness, or of a divinity that has some relationship with the divinity presiding over the shrine (in the case of the Vaiṣṇava temples).

> In many medieval temples, specially in Orissa, this motif.... was carved in the centre of the architrave over the doorway of the main structure, whatever might have been the cult affiliation of the shrines.[376]

The Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Bhubaneswar, the best preserved specimen of the earlier group of temples in Orissa and one of the most lavishly decorated religious sanctuaries (seventh century AD), has the Gaja-Lakṣmī figure depicted on the lintel of its door-jamb. It is more narrative in treatment than the usual hieratic pose. Here one elephant is found sprinkling water on the head of the goddess and the other one is returning from the lotus pond. The lintel of this Śaiva temple contains the scene of *liṅga*-worship along with that of the capture of wild elephants. The door lintel of Svarṇajāleśvara temple at Bhubaneswar (seventh century AD) is decked with the four-armed image of Gaja-Lakṣmī seated in *padmāsana*. The door lintel of Śiśireśvara temple at Bhubaneswar (eighth century AD) contains a beautiful figure of Gaja-Lakṣmī with the usual features but presenting better workmanship. Gaja-Lakṣmī images of the contemporary period are found in Kanakeśvara temple at Kualo and Bhṛṅgeśvara temple at Vajrakot (both situated in Dhenkanal district) as well as in the dilapidated Maṇikeśvara temple at Suklesvara (Cuttack district).

The recent excavations conducted at Bankada, the seat of administration of the Śailodbhavas of Koṅgoda, has brought to light the structure of a temple from where a series of Śaiva-Śākta images belonging to the sixth-seventh centuries AD along with some images of Gaja-Lakṣmī in an archaic pose have been recovered. The Śiva temple at Badagaon (very similar in style to Paraśurāmeśvara temple) has a series of excellent images; among these, Lakṣmī in the four-banded doorframe is exquisitely depicted in a hieratic pose. The Siṁhanātha temple on the Mahanadi, famous for its artistic grandeur, contains the images of Saptamātṛkās in its door-jambs (no such feature is noticed in other temples of Orissa), flanked by the river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā on either side and by the Gaja-Lakṣmī figure seated in *padmāsana*. A Gaja-Lakṣmī image in the same pose is also depicted on the door lintel of the temple with eight *graha*s (planets).

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[376] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

In the temple of Someśvara at Ranipur-Jharial (Balangir district) Lakṣmī is, peculiarly enough, depicted with Someśvara (Śiva), Buddha and Kārttikeya. Seated in *lalitāsana*, the two-armed goddess holds a lotus in her left hand while the right one, in *varada* pose, is flanked by two elephants pouring water from a *kalaśa*. The other important Gaja-Lakṣmī images so far surveyed in Balangir district are found in Kośaleśvara temple at Vaidyanath, Kapileśvara temple at Charda, Nīlamādhava temple at Gandharadi. Bhūdevī (the earth-goddess when conceived as the consort of Viṣṇu) and Śrīdevī (the equivalent of Lakṣmī as the other consort of Viṣṇu) are found depicted on the pedestal of the image of Nīlamādhava (Viṣṇu) worshipped in the temple of Gandharadi. It is significant to note that the depiction of Bhūdevī and Śrīdevī or of Śrīdevī and Sarasvatī below the cult image of Viṣṇu became a tradition in Orissa starting from the Gaṅga period, when Vaiṣṇavism spread as the State religion with Lord Jagannātha of Puri at the apex.

The temples of Khiching in Mayurbhanj district contain excellent images of Gaja-Lakṣmī in their door lintels. One such figure of the goddess in a three-banded frame is illustrated with human beings and animals in alternate pairs on either side climbing a vine. The Śākta-Tāntric temple of Vārāhī at Chaurasi in Puri district contains a cross-legged image of Gaja-Lakṣmī flanked on either side by the fierce images of Vārāhī, iconographically similar to that of the presiding goddess of the shrine. Finally, among the many images carved in the sanctum and *jagamohana* of Bhīmeśvara temple at Mukhalingam (the ancient capital of the Eastern Gaṅgas, now situated in Andhra Pradesh), those of Nṛsiṁha, Mahiṣamardinī and Gaja-Lakṣmī depicted on the lintels are of striking importance. In this temple, built between the tenth and the eleventh century AD, Lakṣmī is given more importance by tracing her association with Durgā and an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

I feel it expedient here to mention that, since all the Orissan temples built in the Somavaṁśī and Gaṅga cultural epochs invariably present the depiction of Gaja-Lakṣmī in the same fashion (of course with better workmanship), I will not discuss them here individually.

DEVELOPMENT OF LAKṢMĪ CULT IN ORISSA

The Imperial Gaṅga period is remarkable in raising Śrī-Lakṣmī to the status of a cult divinity. A separate temple for the worship of this goddess as an individual manifestation was built at Puri in the same period in which the great temple of Jagannātha was constructed. The presiding deity of Lakṣmī temple represents the four-handed goddess seated in *padmāsana* on a lotus. The architecture of this temple, composed of four different chambers, is superb. This appears to be the sole temple dedicated to goddess Lakṣmī in the whole territory of Orissa.

Śrī-Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, was since then on given a special significance as the consort of Viṣṇu/Jagannātha. She became a goddess of the masses, redeeming them from sufferings and bestowing on them abundance and welfare. She was, and still is said to cook food personally in the big kitchen house of Jagannātha temple on as many as two hundred sacred cooking hearths, which are always kept alive with the sacrificial fire known as *vaiṣṇavāgni*; such holy food, after having been 'tasted' by Lakṣmī and offered to Vimalā (the other important goddess enshrined in the premises of Jagannātha temple), becomes *mahāprasāda*, the nectar-like food of Śrī Jagannātha that absolves by all sins those who eat it, irrespective of caste, and is for this reason famous all over India. The composition of the *Lakṣmī* or *Mahālakṣmī Purāṇa* in Oriyā language by the poet Balarāma Dāsa (sixteenth century AD), recording the importance of the goddess in the socio-religious life of the people of Orissa, further heightened the status of Lakṣmī cult. The recital of this regional Purāṇa in the Oriyā households, particularly on each Thursday during the month of Mārgaśīrṣa (November-December), still today forms a part of the ritualistic worship of the goddess in the folk style. This is associated with the worship of Lakṣmī in the shape of paddy measures or ears of wheat.

According to the common sense of the devotees of Śrī Jagannātha, Lakṣmī is conceived as a model devoted Oriyā housewife. She is believed to have the same sentiments and sensitiveness of a faithful and loving Hindu wife, so as that, just to make an instance, when she is deprived of the right to accompany her husband on his car during the annual car festival (*Ratha Yātrā*) of Puri Jagannātha, she is depicted as Adhīra-nāyikā (the Aggrieved-Heroine) as if she was a jealous woman. Jagannātha (Viṣṇu) is said to keep company with another goddess during this festival, for which reason Lakṣmī, in anger over her consort's unfaithfulness, goes in proxy-form to the place where the worshipped image of the god is brought at the end of the procession (Guṇḍicā-bāri at Puri), breaks his decorated chariot and thereafter goes back to the main temple, temporarily locking him out of it. A very popular ceremony known as *Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa Beṇṭha* (meeting of Lakṣmī with Viṣṇu) is subsequently held in the premises of Jagannātha temple in order to make the angry goddess to reconcile with her husband when the Lord returns home on his chariot.[377]

The annual autumnal worship of Gaja-Lakṣmī in the full moon night of Āśvina (September-October) as the bestower of prosperity and general welfare has a special significance in the religions of India. This day is considered to be the birthday of both Lakṣmī and Kumāra or Kārttikeya. In Orissa this festive occasion is more popularly known as *Kumārotsava*, observed generally by the *kumārī*s (unmarried girls) with an intention of having her future husbands as beautiful and powerful as Kumāra. The girls, after a purificatory bath, wear new clothes and make offerings to the sun. They observe fast during daytime and, after offering a special

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377. K.C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-8; D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

type of cakes and sweetmeats to the moon, take pure vegetarian food in the evening. The girls as well as the other people enjoy the whole night amidst singing of songs befitting to the occasion and dancing. The elderly persons keep themselves awake the whole night with a hope of gaining material prosperity through the grace of Lakṣmī. This annual ceremonial form of Lakṣmī-worship, generally termed as *Gaja-Lakṣmī-Pūjā*, is a national festival celebrated with pomp and grandeur like the *Durgā-Pūjā*. On this occasion clay images of the goddess prepared in accordance with the traditional *dhyāna* are worshipped at night only in the individual houses and in the most conspicuous places. In the Lakṣmī temple at Puri this annual worship is observed with special offerings amidst a large gathering of devotees.

It is, thus, seen that Lakṣmī, as the benign divinity of fecundity, prosperity, abundance and welfare, has an unique place in the religious arena of Orissa since she is associated with agricultural wealth (the mainstay of the people).

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Śākta Festivals and Rituals

THE celebration of religious festivals usually reflects the culture of the people in a telescopic form. *Vrata* (vow), *pūjā* (worship in sacred places), *utsava* (celebration), entertainment, merry-making, associated with music and dance, keep the traditional system continuing, binding the community in a socio-cultural fabric. In essence, the performance of a particular festival is the parameter of a society.

Hindu religious festivals are numerous in Orissa, ranging from the tribal and semi-tribal communities to the people of the sophisticated society. Some of them are of national importance, some are widespread irrespective of caste and creed, and some other are confined to particular communities. Generally most of them are religious by nature, are linked with the propitiation of some gods and goddesses, and are observed in a ritualistic manner.

It may also be indicated here, that some traditional festivals observed in the urban areas are meant for appreciation and amusement of the onlookers, often coming from the outside for this specific purpose; conversely, the festivals in the tribal and folk communities are observed for the latter's own enjoyment, keeping all the members of the community itself engaged. This kind of observance is essential in the illiterate communities to have pleasure and digression from their monotonous and hard routine life.

In this chapter I make an attempt to touch upon some important Orissan festivals, out of many, connected with Śakti cult. Whatever be their origin, they are heterogeneous in character. The celebration of these festivals has been prescribed in such an interesting manner, that they succeed one another in cyclic order starting with the Caitra (spring) festivals. The Śākta festivals and the connected ritualistic observances recorded here are associated with manifestations of Śakti such as Durgā, Kālī, Lakṣmī, Pārvatī, Sarasvatī, Manasā, etc. The system of rituals, vows and fasts varies from goddess to goddess, depending on their nature. The rituals connected with blood sacrifice, meant to propitiate Durgā, Kālī and the similar goddesses, are greatly different from the purely vegetarian and non-violent rituals performed in honour of the more benevolent forms of the Mahādevī such as Pārvatī, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, etc.

However, my humble attempt here is to indicate that Hindu religious festivals, whatever may be the ritualistic pattern associated with them, keep the cult traditions alive providing solace, enjoyment and moral strength to the participants.

The cycle of the Caitra festivals

The beginning of the new year is traditionally reckoned in India from the end of the spring season, when the whole nature blossoms and the never-ending yearly renewal of life begins. Yet, owing to the great difference in latitude between the northern and the southern regions of the sub-continent, the Indian spring does not start everywhere in the same period. It follows that the day conventionally marking the beginning of the new year can fall in different periods according to the latitude of the place, all, however, being comprised in the Hindu month of Caitra (March-April).

The Hindu New Year's Day is everywhere associated with great festivals. In the Dravidian countries its celebration coincides with the *Holī* festival, falling on the full moon day preceding the beginning of Caitra. *Holī* is generally believed to have originated out of the Śaivite cycle of festivals, orgiastic in nature, that were anciently held at the beginning of the spring season, but has subsequently turned, especially in North India, into a festival in honour of Kṛṣṇa. It is believed by tradition that the celebration of *Holī* was given a start by Viṣṇu himself as the special spring festival of the śūdras, who on this joyous day are entitled to behave in the most licentious and disrespectful manner.[1]

It seems likely that the *Holī* festival, marking the beginning of the new year in South India, originated from a process of assimilation of the spring fertility rites of the non-Āryan peoples of the Deccan into ancient Śaivism. But in Orissa, where spring starts a little later than in South India, the prevalence of Vaiṣṇavism has long since turned *Holī* into a Kṛṣṇaite festival. The tribal communities of Orissa and the low-caste Hindus too celebrate their respective spring festivals in the month of Caitra, some weeks after the *Holī* festival. This is a month characterised by the enjoyment of abundance, idleness and leisure before the sowing time.

In Orissa most of the festivals held in the month of Caitra culminate on the day that in North India is generally considered the Hindu New Year's Day, namely, the *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* day, reckoned on a conjunction falling on a different date every year, but roughly coinciding with the sun's equinoctial passage in spring. The astrological and mythological importance of this *Saṁkrānti* (a term that indicates the sun's passage from a house of the solar Zodiac to another) will be discussed later on; for now, suffice it to notice that in Orissa a great deal of non-Vedic religious practices having originated in tribal societies (or in the non-Āryan strata of the Hindu society, as it was the case with *Holī* in South India) have merged into a system of *yātrās* (temple festivals) and *vratas* (vows) which, peculiarly enough, celebrate the explosion of spring and the beginning of the new year with the conjoint worship of Śiva and Śakti.

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[1] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India: L'Induismo recente*, Milano, 1981, pp. 347-9; A. Daniélou, *Śiva e Dioniso*, Roma, 1980, pp. 199-203.

The rites traditionally observed in Orissa during the celebration of the Caitra festivals present a tight admixture of tribal and Tāntric elements. Śiva is generally regarded as the cult hero of these religious observances, such as it was once the case with the spring festivals of southern India; nevertheless, it can be maintained that the Mahādevī, in her multifarious forms, appears to be even more venerated than him all through the term of the month. Most of the festivals observed by the Oriyā Hindus in Caitra, indeed, have their seat at this or that Śākta temple, which fact leads one to classify them as allied Śaiva-Śākta festivals. Tribal rituals and beliefs have so deeply penetrated into these Śaiva-Śākta festivals, that nowadays it is hard to dissociate the 'Āryan' cultural elements incorporated in them from the 'non-Āryan' ones. Also as to the most noticeable feature of these festivals, i.e., the ritual self-infliction of physical pain performed by a special class of devotees, it is difficult to separate what derives from the influence of Tantrism on the popular forms of devotion from the remainders of the rites of possession typical of tribal shamanism. It is, thus, necessary here to give some hints on the most important religious festivals celebrated by the hill tribes of Orissa during the month of Caitra so as to individuate the possible local sources of inspiration for the peculiar forms of worship being adopted by the low-caste Hindus of the plains in the same period of the year.

TRIBAL FESTIVALS IN THE MONTH OF CAITRA

The *Chait Parab* (Sanskrit *Caitra Parvaṇa*), the spring festival of the tribals of Koraput district, is the most important communal festival of the year there. This is an agricultural festival of the axe-cultivators which starts with hunting before the forest is cleared for cultivation by means of the use of fire. This is aimed to sum up ritually the entire economic history of these tribes, from the food-gathering-plus-hunting stage to the agricultural one. For the whole month people sacrifice domestic and wild animals before their fetish gods at night and then cook and eat them, feast, drink, sing and dance. Among the Koyas of the Malkangiri area this festival, locally known as *Bija Pandu*, is dedicated to Mother Earth, who is then propitiated with the offering of liquors and sacrificial animals.[2] Among the Ollar Gadabas this festival coincides with the ritual spring hunt. Before going to hunt, the male of the tribe use to sacrifice animals to their goddess of wild beasts, who dwells in the jungle. The offering are made before the guns, bows and arrows utilised for hunting.[3] It is

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2. R.N. Dash, 'Folk Festivals of Orissa — A Study', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXIII, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 71; D.N. Patnaik, *Festivals of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1982, pp. 82-3.
3. K.N. Thusu and M. Jha, *Ollar Gadba of Koraput*, Calcutta, 1972, pp. 115-6.

worth noticing that either among the Dravidian-speaking Koyas and their Austro-Asiatic-speaking neighbours the Gadabas, women only are allowed to dance during the festival; the Gadaba women in particular use to get drunk, sing and dance day and night while their husbands and male relatives are being engaged in hunting.[4] Such an archaic tribal tradition may be related to the past dominance of the female gender in the religious sphere and be, thus, reminiscent of the female-dominated form of religion that, as hypothesised in chapter 1, might have prevailed in eastern India in pre-historic times.

Caitra is also one of the months reserved by tradition by some important tribal groups of Orissa to the sacrifice of the buffalo. The *Karja* ceremony of the Hill Saoras of Ganjam and Koraput districts, held in commemoration of the dead ancestors every two-three years in February or March, requires the nocturnal slaughter of a number of buffaloes proportionate to the number of families in the village having some of their late members, died in the previous six years, to be propitiated. Each family offers a buffalo as a sacrifice to its own ancestral spirits. F. Fawcett, while attending a *Karja* ceremony held in 1886 at Kehlakot in Ganjam district, counted about one thousand such sacrificial buffaloes. The ceremony is usually conducted by shamanins who fall in trance with the use of alcoholic drinks and keep vigil all night with the spirits of the dead.[5] The buffalo in this case represents the necessary blood offering for making the spirits of the dead feel no longer neglected by the living and rest, thus, in peace in the underworld, abstaining from any attack or nuisance.

The other important seasonal ceremony performed by the Hill Saoras of Orissa in honour of the dead ancestors, the *Guar*, is preferably held in February, though it can be celebrated at any time during the dry season. Also this ceremony is pivoted upon buffalo-sacrifice; moreover, being part of a megalithic tradition, it is associated with the erection of menhirs, regarded as the temporary 'houses' of the forefathers' shades on the earth before they are permitted to settle in their permanent 'houses' in the underworld. This appears to be related with the cultus of Mother Earth, who was regarded in the Neolithic age as the guardian of the dead and, at the same time, of the new-life seed.[6] So was also regarded the Hindu goddess Kālī in the historical period, starting at least from the time of elaboration of the myth of Kṛṣṇa's birth, later on included in the *Harivaṁśa*, in which this goddess is described as a chthonic being having a 'black womb' which contains the waters of the infernal regions with their population of dead *asuras*, who are at one time the embryos of new potential human beings.[7]

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[4] K.M. Mohapatra, 'Tribes of Orissa', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, Cuttack, 1993, p. 387; K.N. Thusu and M. Jha, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

[5] V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, Bombay, 1955, pp. 378 ff.

[6] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 358 ff.

[7] W.D. O'Flaherty, *Miti dell'Induismo*, Parma, 1989, pp. 218 ff.

Finally, one cannot leave out of our consideration the famous *Kedu* festival of the Kondhs of south-western Orissa, celebrated in the month of Caitra to propitiate the earth-goddess, known among the Kondhs as Dharni Deota or Dharni Penu (cf. the Sanskrit name of the same deity, Dharaṇī). This festival was notorious in times past on account of its association with the cruel sacrificial rite known as *Meriah* (human sacrifice), which was abolished owing to the resolute repressive intervention of the British authorities in the mid-part of the nineteenth century. Since then onwards the Kondh people started sacrificing buffaloes instead of human victims. Yet this forced change did not modify the chief beliefs underlying the *Kedu* festival, namely, that the earth goddess incessantly cries out for blood, and that the sacred power contained in the blood of the living beings sacrificed to her will bring about fertility and plenty and will ensure her protection against famines and epidemics not to the sole Kondhs, rather to the whole of the human race.

Thus, in the past, there appears to have been a close connection between the *Meriah* sacrifice, usually performed by the Kondhs in spring, and the worship of the earth-goddess in the same season. The Kondh earth-goddess is very similar to Hindu village-goddesses. Under this latter aspect of hers, the Kondhs call her Jakari Penu (in Kui, the Dravidian language spoken by these tribesmen, *jakar* means 'founder of a village' or 'born under a stone in a village' while *penu* or *pinnu* means a deity[8]). She is normally represented by a cairn (Kui *dharni*) formed by three stones installed on the village main street, in front of which sacrifices are offered. There appears to be a link between these stones and the patriarchs of each Kondh village, a link which is possibly indicative of the past connection of the worship of the earth-goddess with megalithic rites (which are, however, no longer part of the Kondh religious tradition). The *Meriah* sacrifice, like the sacrifice of a buffalo that nowadays replaces it, was performed by the priest-shamans of the earth goddess, who often used to kill the victim after having tied him up to a wooden pole, representing Dharni Penu on this special occasion.[9] This blood-thirsty pillar-form of the earth goddess appears to have greatly contributed to the formation of the cult of Stambheśvarī, the Hindu pillar-goddess worshipped from time immemorial by some tribes of Orissa (the Kondh and Gond above all), some Hinduised semi-tribal communities and their kṣatriya rulers as well.[10]

From another viewpoint the Kondh earth-goddess, one of the subsidiary names of whom is Tari Penu or also Tara Penu (the Kui word *tara* means land, earth[11]), is assimilated in south-western Orissa to the Hindu paired-off goddesses Tārā-Tāriṇī, worshipped from the hoary past in aniconic form in a shrine lying on a hill of Ganjam district, at which the *Meriah* sacrificial rite was once the norm.[12] Tārā-Tāriṇī temple is now the annual seat of a great Hindu *yātrā* which is, significantly enough in the given context, held in the month of Caitra like the *Kedu* festival of the Kondhs. The special offerings presented to the twin deities on the occasion of this *yātrā* consist in the blood of sacrificed animals and in fresh coconuts; the latter are broken and opened inside the sacrificial pit facing the temple in a *yajña* ritual symbolising the sap of life's oozing from the womb of the great goddess.

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[8] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

[9] V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, London, 1954, pp. 545 ff. and 636; B.M. Boal, *The Konds*, Bhubaneswar, 1984, p. 91.

[10] N.K. Sahu, 'Orissa from the Earliest Times to the Present Day', in Id., ed., *A History of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1956, pp. 351-6.

[11] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 641.

The earth-goddess of the Kondhs, in her creator and anthropomorphised aspect (under which she is called Nirantali), appears to be one of the major pre-Vedic or non-Āryan archetypes of the great Goddess worshipped since early epochs by the Śāktas of Orissa. Nirantali is described in some Kondh myths as the motherly nourisher of all living beings; she is stated to have emerged from the underworld and has, therefore, a chthonic nature; she is the pure goddess of the lotus (like the Hindu Śrī-Lakṣmī) and the sister of trees (like the Hindu *yakṣīs*); like Durgā/Kālī, she is fond of wine and blood; finally, this form of an earth-goddess is fancied to be sustained by a seat made of snakes, which feature finds a correspondence in an epithet of the mythical serpent Śeṣa, Dharaṇīdhara, i.e., the Sustainer-of-the-Earth.[13]

To sum up, the festivals observed by the different tribes of Orissa during the month of Caitra can be grouped into three broad classes according to their chief aim, namely:

(a) seasonal adoration of an earth or a vegetation goddess presiding over the ritual spring hunt and associated with wild animals as well as with animal sacrifices (among the Kondhs, until relatively recent times, even with human sacrifices) and, in certain cases, with unrestrained drinking, feasting, singing and dancing (the leading characters of which are often the women of the tribe) ;

(b) ancient megalithic ceremonies for the propitiation of the dead ancestors and relatives, which are associated with buffalo-sacrifice and with shamanistic possession rites as is the case with the Hill Saoras (among whom shamanins play a prominent role during the ceremonies in question). Among the Kondhs, the connecting link with this archaic female-dominated megalithic complex is represented by the figure of the earth-goddess herself, who is worshipped by these tribesmen in a cairn of three stones and is conceived by them as the Great Ancestress, i.e., the symbolic founder of the entire Kondh people;

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[12] H.C. Das, 'Religious Movements in Southern Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXV, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 35.

[13] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. XLVI-XLVII, 76, 101 and 298-9.

(c) hunting-agricultural festivals indicating the fundamental importance of the use of fire in the traditional tribal economic system (the *Chait Parab* of the tribals of Koraput district). This is connected with the ritual spring hunt and with the firing of forests immediately preceding it as a preparatory agricultural work for the cultivation of new soil in the ambit of the tribal system of field-shifting. Among the Mundas and some Gond tribes of Bastar (Madhya Pradesh) the festivals in question are associated with the propitiation of an earth goddess or of a female deity of vegetation and wild animals.[14]

As stated above, tribal traditions must have influenced the religious practices and beliefs followed by the Oriyā village folk during the allied Śaiva-Śākta festivals celebrated in Caitra. For instance, on the chief ceremonial occasions of this month sacrificial animals, now essentially limited to fowls, are immolated by the villagers before goddess Maṅgalā, who during the spring season is generally represented by a pot filled with water, taken to be a symbol of good omen.[15] However, the nature of such offerings has changed very much in course of time. Owing to the progressive detribalisation of the Caitra festivals, sacrificial animals have been mostly replaced by vegetarian offerings to suit the non-violent and vegetarian Hindu believers. Thus, for instance, the *Caitra Maṅgalvār Oṣa* (fasting on each Tuesday during this month), specially observed by the womenfolk and associated at many places with the purely vegetarian conjoint worship of Gaurī and Maṅgalā, is the outcome of a long historical conflict between the cult practices prescribed in tribal religions and the moral tenets of other ancient religions of Orissa (Jainism, Buddhism and Brāhmaṇical Hinduism), which generally preached non-injury and vegetarianism. Some folk stories associated with the institution of this *oṣa* narrate the rage of the king due to the performance of animal sacrifices in honour of Maṅgalā, as well as his final acceptance of this cult for his own benefit under pressure of the low-caste women's devotion to the goddess.[16] The historical basis of these tales appears to be the compromise made by the upper-caste people of Orissa with the semi-tribal cult of Maṅgalā — too deeply rooted in the country to be simply suppressed — after its depuration from some unacceptable form of animal sacrifice (perhaps the sacrifice of cows,[17] which was once very common among some Orissan tribes).

Nowadays, besides fowls, only goats (but not at all buffaloes) are sacrificed here and there in Devī temples at the time of the spring festivals of Caitra, even though this ritual custom is now progressively disappearing owing to the recent awakening of public consciousness all over India about the question of non-injury in worship activities. Thus, just to make some instances of the prevalent trend in Orissa in regard to this matter, at the temple of Nārāyaṇī in Ganjam district the ancient custom of offering the goat's head and blood directly to the presiding goddess of the shrine is still today in vogue, while at Maṅgalā temple of Kakatpur, which is the most important sanctuary being dedicated to this deity in Orissa, blood offerings, due to the repressive influence of the Vaiṣṇava preaching, are now presented before the fearful Cāmuṇḍā image worshipped as Dakṣiṇa Caṇḍī, housed in the southern main niche of the temple.

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[14] R. Rahmann, 'The Ritual Spring Hunt of Northeastern and Middle India', *Anthropos*, vol. XLVII (1952), pp. 874-6.

[15] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 71.

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 71-2.

[17] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-64.

Besides giving rise to the Śākta ritual practice of sacrificing animals to the Goddess in the month of Caitra, the spring festivals traditionally celebrated in this month by the tribal peoples of Orissa appear to have exerted an influence on some other important aspects of the corresponding Hindu festivals. The origins of a variety of dangerous and painful ordeals (in some cases regarded by the scholars as different substitutes for the performance of human sacrifice[18]), of the superstitious belief in the purificatory power of fire, and of a series of tribal-like dance shows, representing as a whole the most outstanding cultic features of the community worship in the Śaiva and Śākta temples of Orissa during the month of Caitra, can be traced back, at least in part, to the above-discussed tribal festivals (the *Kedu* festival of the Kondhs, the *Chait Parab* of the tribals of Koraput district, the shamanistic ceremonies of the Hill Saoras, etc.).

It is now time to see how the allied Śaiva-Śākta festivals of Caitra concretely articulate in present-day Orissa.

DAṆḌANĀṬA

The most famous Tāntric festival of Orissa among those being celebrated in the month of Caitra is no doubt *Daṇḍanāṭa*, the Dance-of-the-Pole, a name referring to the pole or staff (Sanskrit *daṇḍa*) that represents Śiva during this holy function. The Devī too is actively worshipped during the festival, though only in her subsidiary role as the divine spouse of Śiva. On this occasion, as it is customary in Orissa at the time of the Caitra festivals, she is frequently represented by a simple earthen pot filled with water.

The *Daṇḍanāṭa* tradition probably originated out of the cultural environment of the śūdra communities living in the semi-tribal areas of Orissa, who were anciently the followers of Tāntric (Vajrayāna) Buddhism. During the Somavaṁśī period (tenth-early twelfth centuries AD), when Śaivism virtually became the State religion of the Orissan kingdom, these groups of Buddhist cattle-rearers and farmers were degraded into down-trodden untouchables by the then triumphant Śaivite ruling classes of the country, and had to be forcedly converted to the Śaiva faith to survive in the changed socio-religious scenario. But they were not permitted to enter Śaiva temples, where the *liṅga* of the great God was worshipped by the 'twice-born' Hindus with rites the performance of which was precluded to the untouchables; therefore, they introduced a new mode of Śiva-worship, an annual religious festival of their own on the occasion of which Śiva was represented by a staff. This cultic feature presents some analogy with the symbolism of the *liṅga*, a phallic one. Most probably this religious observance, subsequently termed as *Daṇḍanāṭa*, had in the origin much in common with the well-known *Phallophorias* of the Greek tradition (the Dyonisian mass processions held in spring and pivoted upon the adoration of a phallic emblem) or with the processions in honour of goddess Isis and her consort Osiris which anciently took place in Egypt. The common religio-cultural background of this type of festivals, which low-class people adhered to all over the ancient Indo-Mediterranean area of civilization, was possibly formed by a primitive nucleus of *Saturnalia*-like festive proceedings which, according to a section of scholars, had a wide distribution throughout the geographic area in question during the proto-historic epoch.[19]

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[18] M. Biardeau, *L'Induismo. Antropologia di una civiltà*, Milano, 1985, p. 175.

Be that as it may, the original character of *Daṇḍanāṭa*, which was supposedly orgiastic and licentious, has forever been lost in consequence of the influence having been exerted on it by the Buddhist faith during the medieval period. Nowadays the wandering śūdra devotees, known as *bhakta*s, who act as the leading characters of the festival observe strict fast, abstain from wine or drug intoxication and restrain from sexual intercourse and from any other kind of worldly pleasure, fully controlling their senses. They focus their attention on dancing vigorously with the *daṇḍa* of Śiva attached on their back and sing very ancient Oriyā folk songs while enacting episodes from the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* and the main Purāṇas. They also perform difficult acrobatics and dangerous aquatic feats in honour of Śiva. Thus, it will appear clear that no *vāmācāra* practice is attached to *Daṇḍanāṭa*.[20]

In addition to this, different rites of ordeal, such as piercing sharp iron nails on one's back, using poisonous snakes as garlands, hanging with head downwards over a burning flame, etc., are performed by the most zealous *bhakta*s during the festival.[21] Some of these rituals of self-inflicted penance are also common to the *Chadak Pūjā* of Bengal and to the *Pāṭuā Yātrā* of Orissa (the latter will be discussed in the next sub-section).

During another rite performed on the occasion of the *Daṇḍanāṭa* festival, the so-called *Vāsuki-darśana*, certain *bhakta*s bury their heads in the ground and then lie prostrate adhering to the soil as if they were enjoying the sight (*darśana*) of the Nāga king Vāsuki, who is stated to dwell in the infernal regions and to sustain the earth on his many hoods.[22] This rite may have some connection with an extremely ancient rite of shamanistic initiation that was once in vogue among the Australian aborigines. In the latter case the initiate was believed to acquire the power of the serpent — one of the chief totemic animals of the Australian tribes — by entering a sinuous underground hollow representing the serpent's mouth, by which he was first 'swallowed' to be subsequently 'vomited out' as a new man.[23] As suggested in chapter 1 of this work, a strong connection between the serpent as a symbol of initiation to mysteries and the earth goddess is found in the greater part of the religious traditions of the world. Thus, it may be concluded that the *Vāsuki-darśana* rite, still today performed by some low-caste Oriyā devotees of Śiva-Śakti during the month of Caitra, is most probably the relic of a shamanistic ceremony connected with the worship of Mother Earth and of her Nāga associates.

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[19] K.B. Das, *A Study of Orissan Folk-Lore*, Santiniketan, 1953, pp. 61-4; A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-203.

[20] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

The last-mentioned religious feature introduces an aspect of the *Daṇḍanāṭa* festival which is complementary to the worship of Śiva, i.e., the worship of Śiva's consort goddess (representing Mother Earth) in her two-fold aspect as Gaurī and as Kālī. Gaurī, the fair-complexioned form of the divine spouse of Śiva, is especially worshipped in aniconic form as a cane which, after being paired with another cane representing Śiva, is placed in the sacred pitcher full of water (another symbol of the great goddess of life, death and regeneration) which is customarily buried under the ground during the festival to be disinterred one year later.[24] The black-complexioned Kālī is, on the contrary, mainly worshipped in iconic form: her image, depicting her as trampling on the motionless body of Śiva, is generally painted on a bamboo screen which is taken in procession during the celebration of *Daṇḍanāṭa* in South Orissa.[25] The goddess can also be symbolised by a man, dressed as a female, who wears a mask reproducing her fearful face; this man performs a dance called *Kālikā Nṛtya*, during which he is believed to be possessed by the spirit of Kālī. The Kālī component of the festival appears to be more important than the Gaurī one; in this connection, it must be mentioned that, during the celebration of *Daṇḍanāṭa*, the Oriyā folk worship Śiva as a black-complexioned god (Kālā-Rudra) rather than as a fair-complexioned one as per the orthodox Purāṇic tradition. Given the context, the black colour of this form of Śiva is probably meant to reproduce in a symbolic way the dark complexion of his non-Āryan worshippers, whose descendants became the śūdras of the Indian caste system. Therefore, the association of the

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22. J.B. Mohanty, 'Daṇḍa — A Folk Festival of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXXIII, Nos. 1 and 2, p. 59.

23. F. Dilaria, *Mito ed iconografia del serpente. Il culto dei nāga nell'India classica*, Roma, s.d., p. 10.

24. K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-3.

25. D.N. Pathy, 'Orissan Painting', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 225.

black-goddess Kālī to the black form of Śiva peculiarly worshipped by the low-caste people of Orissa on the occasion of *Daṇḍanāṭa* appears very appropriate.[26]

The age-old association of *Daṇḍanāṭa* with Śakti cult (and not with Śiva cult only) is evinced by the celebration of this festival at such eminent Śākta shrines of Orissa as those of Hiṅgulā at Talcher, of Bhaṭṭārikā at Baramba, of Carcikā at Banki, of Samalei at Sambalpur, of Rāmacaṇḍī at Konarak, and of Sāralā at Jhankad.[27] Thus, the *Daṇḍanāṭa* festival can be defined as a synthesis of folk, Tāntric Buddhist, Śaiva and Śākta religio-cultural elements having amalgamated in course of centuries starting from at least the Somavaṁśī period.

PĀṬUĀ YĀTRĀ

As already indicated, the set of Caitra festivals of Orissa has resulted from the amalgamation of Śiva and Śakti cults. All of these festivals are characterised by rituals invariably officiated to by non-brāhmaṇa priests, rigorous observance of fast, self-infliction of physical pain, and display of heroism through tolerance of torture and performance of bold deeds.

The śūdra or the scheduled-caste devotees, penitents and pilgrims who ritually inflict injury to their persons are called *pāṭuās*, a name derived from the Sanskrit term *paṭa*, meaning a cloth (for some of these devotees wear on their head a long piece of black cloth they use to elegantly wave while dancing).[28] Their acts of penance, usually performed near a tank or river where all villagers congregate to witness the rites of ordeal, can alternatively consist in piercing iron hooks on their back or big needles on their tongue; in walking barefoot on thorns and nails or getting prickled all over their body; in being carried in palanquins while standing on edged swords; in hanging from an horizontal staff fastened at the top of a high wooden pole and wheeled round and round by the people below; in dancing on stilts while keeping a pitcher on the head; and so on. While doing so, the *pāṭuās* are morally supported with holy cheers by the mass of the onlookers, and they themselves loudly continue singing in praise of the great Goddess, who, during the festival, is generally worshipped in her form as Maṅgalā.[29] *Pāṭuā Yātrā*, in fact, is specifically meant for the propitiation of goddess Maṅgalā, the Auspicious-One,[30] and can, thus, be classified among the Śākta-Tāntric festivals of Orissa. This is the main difference between this festival and the *Daṇḍanāṭa* one, which is, on the contrary, primarily meant to glorify Śiva.

The *pāṭuās* are sub-divided into different classes according to the religious exercises in which they are specialised. They sing songs dealing with epic and Purāṇic narratives or episodes from folk tales. Only occasionally some of them dance. Two or three parties of *pāṭuās* sometimes compete in the compound of a Devī temple on the invitation of some rich man. The latter feature indicates that *Pāṭuā Yātrā*, though it is a festival of the low-class people, is often patronised and supported by the upper-class Oriyās, who by tradition join the festival for fulfilling a vow made to the Goddess at the time of sickness or of some other misfortune. The sanctity and pureness of mind of the *pāṭuās*, the spiritual strength bestowed on them by the Goddess in exchange for their ritual self-injuring, their taking upon themselves the sufferings of the people irrespective of caste, contribute altogether to draw to the festival the worshippers of all walks of life, who generally observe it with much austerity by joining the *pāṭuās*' fast.[31]

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[26] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-4.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 66; D. N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 10 (from the foreword by R.R. Das).

[28] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

[29] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-2; Orissa Tourism Development Corporation, ed., *The Heritage of Orissa*, Cuttack, s.d., p. 56.

[30] H.C. Das, 'Heritage of Orissa', in Id., ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p.13.

The most important religious ceremony observed during *Pāṭuā Yātrā*, viz., the adoration of the sacred water pitcher symbolising goddess Maṅgalā (*maṅgala-kalaśa*) after the latter has been taken in procession around different villages by the *pāṭuās* with great enthusiasm, plays a very important part in all the festivals celebrated in Orissa during the month of Caitra.[32]

JHĀMU YĀTRĀ

The most sanctified and popular Śākta-Tāntric penance among those annexed to the cycle of the Caitra festivals of Orissa is no doubt the fire ordeal, performed with large gathering of pilgrims particularly during the *Jhāmu Yātrās* (fire-walking festivals) held at Maṅgalā temple of Kakatpur, Sāralā temple of Jhankad and Carcikā temple of Banki.[33] On this occasion the *pāṭuās* or *bhaktas* walk in trance on a bed of burning charcoal amidst a crowd of devotees inciting them with holy cheers; their exploit is accompanied by the loud sound of gongs and drums and by the dance show of costumed dancers. Customarily seven ditches are dug in the ground and filled with red hot charcoal. A mixture of milk and water is poured in another ditch, in which the penitents dip their feet before starting to walk on burning charcoals; this is believed to defend them from scalding their feet.[34] At the Śākta sanctuary of Kakatpur a smaller hole, dug out in the middle of this ditch, is filled with turmeric water and seasonal flowers and is worshipped as an aniconic representation of goddess Maṅgalā.[35]

Traditionally the scheduled day for the performance of the fire ordeal is the *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* day, yet the festival termed as *Jhāmu Yātrā* is celebrated for about four weeks from the month of Caitra (March-April) to that of Vaiśākha (April-May). For weeks before *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* groups of penitents can be observed while journeying through the main ritual purification centres of Orissa, particularly the Śākta ones, wearing saffron and yellow garments and carrying huge fronds of peacock feathers. On the culminating dates of the festival the *pāṭuās* practise fasting and self-torture, including the fire ordeal, during the day, while at night ritualistic worship, dance show and recitation of sacred pantomimes provide the mass of the devotees with both spiritual thought and mundane entertainment. A different form of fire-worship annually takes place on these same dates at Gopalprasad near Talcher (Dhenkanal district) on the occasion of the great *yātrā* dedicated to the fire-goddess Hiṅgulā, which has been already described in chapter 3.

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[31] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 64 and 81-3.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

[33] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 10 (from the foreword by R.R. Das).

[34] J.B. Mohanty, *art. cit.*, pp. 57-64.

[35] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

The main purpose of the low-caste Śākta devotees who expose themselves to the risk implicit in the fire ordeal is to amaze the onlookers and draw their reverence through the practical display of the 'Tāntric' or 'magical' power being conferred on them by the Goddess — who, it is understood, will normally protect the performers of the ordeal from the consequences of their contact with fire. Above all, the fire ordeal is a demonstration of a devotee's will-power, tenacity and fervour to *dharma*. The fire-walking ceremony is mentioned in Sanskrit texts as *vahni-parīkṣā*, and is always meant as a process of self-purification or a preparation for higher spiritual purpose. According to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sītā, the wife of Rāma, performed this ordeal in Laṅkā to prove her purity to the world after she had been repudiated by her husband under the charge of having dwelt with the demon Rāvaṇa. Also Draupadī, the wife of the five Pāṇḍavas, is said in the *Mahābhārata* to take a daily fire-bath to purify herself.[36]

The association of Sītā and Draupadī, venerated as Śākta goddesses in some areas of India, with the rite of fire ordeal results very interesting when put in relation with the performance of the same rite mostly in the premises of Śākta temples. In this connection, it can be mentioned that fire-walking is considered by some scholars as one of the numerous substitutes for human sacrifice. This painful religious exercise is believed to have been associated with the ritualistic pattern observed in a section of Śākta shrines after the decline of the practice of human sacrifice in India.[37]

However, fire-walking is neither an exclusive ritualistic feature of Śāktism, nor is it confined to Orissa only; rather, it is a common religious practice in many areas of the world. The fire ordeal is meant in many primitive cultures as a pious exercise for purification of body and mind. The practice is, or was in the past, well-known in some regions of Oceania, Japan, China and South India. The aborigines of Chota Nagpur, among whom are the Mundas, are also accustomed to ritual fire-walking. This may result of some interest in the context under discussion, if one thinks that the area of settlement of the Mundas overlaps to the south with the tribal belt of North Orissa. The archaic belief in the beneficent agency of fire, to which is attributed the faculty of consuming all diseases and evil, seems to be at the root of the fire-walking traditions diffused from the Indian sub-continent to Polynesia.[38]

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[36] *Ibid.*, p. 85; R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, II, Calcutta, 1963, p. 317.

[37] M. Biardeau, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

TĀNTRIC AND TRIBAL CULTURAL ELEMENTS IN THE CAITRA ORDEALS

There is no unanimity among the scholars as to whether the basic character of the rituals of ordeal being customarily performed in Orissa during the month of Caitra is mainly tribal or rather Tāntric. The second hypothesis, namely, that the devotional practices in question have originated out of the religio-cultural environment of the low-caste and semi-tribal people of Orissa under the preponderant influence of medieval Tantrism, seems to be the prevalent one.[39] In fact, the performance of painful *vratas* (vows) near a Śaiva or a Śākta temple in the time of the Caitra festivals seems first of all aimed at drawing the attention of the God or Goddess upon the *pāṭuā*'s or *bhakta*'s heroic deeds. Therefore, one could be induced to recognise in these devotional practices the reverberation of the Tāntric concept about the *vīramārga*, the 'path of heroes', the ultimate goal of which is to obtain some *siddhi* (magical power) by the grace of a Tāntric deity. At the same time, the Caitra ordeals are also meant to show the mass of the onlookers the almost superhuman powers being bestowed by Śiva or by the Devī on the penitents in exchange for their unlimited devotion to them.

The practices of ritual self-mutilation associated with medieval Śakti cult in South India, as well as the Haṭha-yoga tradition incorporated into Tantrism in the course of the medieval period, may also have influenced the self-torture acts and physical exercises characterising the cycle of the Caitra festivals in Orissa. This said, still the possibility that the festivals celebrated by some tribal communities of Orissa during the month of Caitra may have influenced the development of the Hindu spring festivals centring round the performance of painful ordeals, cannot be ruled out. The tribals festivals in question are, in fact, characterised in some cases by frenzied and unrestrained dancing or by ritualistic spirit-possession, and lay emphasis, in some other, upon the sacredness and the socio-economic importance of fire.

In addition to this, self-torture acts are not at all infrequent in the shamanistic religions of Orissa and, more in general, in those of Middle India. Spirit-possession must be authenticated by the shaman with demonstrating that his body, powerfully reinforced by a visitant from the other world, can resist any injury. Thus, the Gond shamans prove the genuineness of their possession experiences by piercing pointed spikes through their cheeks or arms; the Gadaba, Saora and Bondo shamans rock themselves to and fro on swings provided with a seat of thorns; other tribal shamans beat themselves with great stones or fill their mouths with fire, while still others fling themselves violently to the ground. Rituals of self-injury are also diffused among the Kondhs, who customarily perform them on the occasion of the religious festival known as *Chirik Poja*. The ultimate purpose of all of these tribal ordeals is to prove that a shaman or a sacred man is out of his own wits, truly possessed by a spirit or a deity who is satisfied with what he has been offered.[40]

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[38] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 68; D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

The punctual correspondence between the self-torture acts performed by the Oriyā *pāṭuās* and *bhaktas* and those performed by the tribal shamans and sacred men possibly indicate that similar religious principles underlie both these types of ordeal, although in the former case one cannot speak of shamanistic possession in a strict sense. However, it should appear clear that the Caitra ordeals of Orissa are not related to the Tantra culture only, nor it can be maintained, as some Orissan scholars do, that

> the tribal people have adopted the ritual from the Hindus as such rituals are not in the tradition of the tribal culture(!)[41]

Perhaps a still more fitting parallel can be drawn between the ordeals taken by the low-caste Hindus of Orissa during the month of Caitra and those performed by the low-caste Hindus of the Deccan in honour of their village goddesses or *grāma-devatās*.

> The village-goddess festival is often the time of undertaking heroic vows, which greatly heighten the aroused state of the village. Fire-walking, carrying burning pots on one's head, and swinging while suspended on hooks through one's flesh are all common during these festivals and are associated with trance and possession. These ordeals invite the presence of the goddess by expressing the devotee's willingness to fully encounter the dangerous power of the goddess, who is aroused, hot and fierce. While there is considerable risk involved in so encountering the goddess, it is understood that the ordeal is taken in gratitude for her blessing in the past or her mercy in the present and that she is particularly fond of those who so approach her and will usually see that no harm will come to them. In return for villagers' taking on a part of her excess fury or heat generated by contact with demons, the goddess blesses her devotees by protecting them during their ordeal.[42]

At any rate, unlike what happens during the village-goddess festivals of the Dravidians, in the Caitra festivals of Orissa the positive virtues embodied by the benevolent and merciful aspect of the Goddess (Gaurī, Maṅgalā, etc.) seem to prevail over the malevolent and cruel disposition typical of South Indian village goddesses, who are generally considered to be the dispensers of smallpox and of other dangerous diseases.

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[40] V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, p. 203; K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[41] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

[42] D. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, Delhi (etc.), 1986, pp. 206-7.

Even so, the power to avert epidemics that is implicit in the auspicious forms of the Devī is greatly venerated during these Orissan festivals. For the whole month of Caitra, groups of non-brāhmaṇa dancing priests attached to the holiest Śākta shrines of the State, the so-called *ghaṇṭa-pāṭuās*, move in procession from village to village with the sacred pitcher filled with water symbolising the Goddess in auspicious form. They are named so after the *ghaṇṭa*, a brass gong they use to play in accompaniment to their dance show. The *ghaṇṭa* is traditionally regarded all over India as a powerful demon-scarer. This object might have been originally used to scare away wild beasts, whereas its later ceremonial use as an evil-driver emblem might have originated on the analogy of the tribal conception of a goddess controlling the animal kingdom.[43] Thus, there might exist here a connection with the ritual spring hunt of the tribals. The *ghaṇṭa-pāṭuās* of Orissa perform a peculiar dance on stilts which is very similar to a variety of dance in use in Mysore, another Indian region rich in ancient Śākta traditions. Theirs is a Tāntric dance characterised by particular ritual hand-poses (*mudrās*) and difficult yogic postures. One of such priests, known as the *ghaṭa-pāṭuā*, who is dressed as a female (a religious custom typical of Śāktism), dances on stilts with the holy pitcher of the goddess (*ghaṭa*) 'dangerously' balanced on a wooden stand being placed on his head.[44]

After the performance of the festival, some other non-brāhmaṇa Śākta priests move through the Hindu villages of coastal Orissa carrying with them a proxy-image of Maṅgalā (a clothed club) and promising to the people immunity from diseases in exchange for their offerings and devotion to the goddess. Finally, if epidemics or other natural calamities occur during the period of the Caitra festivals, the shaman of the village goddess (*kālasi*) is engaged and interprets the will of the deity.[45] It can, thus, be concluded that the points of contact among the Caitra festivals of Orissa and the typical village-goddess festivals of South India are many.

MAHĀVIṢUVA SAṀKRĀNTI

As already mentioned, the *yātrās* held in Orissa in the month of Caitra culminate in most cases on the *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* day, the New Year's Day of North India, making a grand finale of the whole celebration. This important astronomical conjunction, marking the beginning of the solar month of Vaiśākha (April-May), is already mentioned in the Dasapalla copper-plate grant of the Orissan king Raṇaka Śatrubhañjadeva of the Bhauma-kara dynasty, which was probably issued in AD 934.[46] In Orissa this festive day is otherwise known as *Paṇā Saṁkrānti* in that a kind of sweetened water, called *paṇā*, is offered on this occasion to the brāhmaṇas and the poor people in general along with parasols, fans and wooden slippers as a remedy for the scorching sun that in this period of the year heralds the torrid season.

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[43] R.C. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 19, n. 72.

[44] D.N. Patnaik, 'Dance Tradition of Orissa', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 316.

[45] H.C. Das, 'Tradition of Folk Music and Dance in Orissa', in Id., ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, p. 340.

The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, a Śaiva work principally dealing with ceremonies and rituals,[47] states that the usage of offering cool sweetened water to the thirsty people, common all over India on the *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* day, was established on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra by Bhīṣma, the commander-in-chief of the Kauravas in the *Mahābhārata* war and the personification of the ideals of nobility, asceticism and obedience to *dharma*. Having been mortally pierced with innumerable arrows by Arjuna, Bhīṣma fell from his chariot, but yet he remained upheld from the ground thanks to the arrows themselves, which formed a sort of bed of darts under his body. As his last act of ascetic penance he survived in this condition for fifty-eight days till *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* — the day he had chosen to die — thanks to the magico-yogic power to protract his life bestowed on him by the gods. But he felt very thirsty, and there was no water at all on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. Then Arjuna, having pity on him, shot an arrow deep into the ground so that water sprang forth and quenched the dying warrior's thirst. Thereafter Bhīṣma, moved by gratefulness, fixed up by the force of his penance that those who would ever since offer cool water to the thirsty people on that day will be forgiven all their sins and will please their dead ancestors as well as all gods.[48]

The association of this epic episode with the day that, in Orissa and in other parts of eastern India, marks the culmination of the spring ordeals in honour of Śiva and Śakti appears, in a certain sense, very appropriate. One can find in the motif of the *śara-śayyā*, the bed of arrows lying upon which Bhīṣma does his last penance, an echo of the self-torture acts carried out by the *pāṭuās* particularly on the *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* day. Bhīṣma's power to indefinitely postpone his death is directly related to his superhuman yogic power, acquired through heavy ascetic austerities; similarly, the *pāṭuās* 'challenge' death in a symbolic sense with the support of their pseudo-yogic training.

What originated first, the story about Bhīṣma's ascetic qualities and magic ability contained in the *Mahābhārata*, or rather the shamanistic-like and yogic-like rites of self-injury and of ordeal typifying the celebration of *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* among the low-caste people and the untouchables of eastern India? Unfortunately, this important question seems destined to remain unanswered due to the scarcity of archaeological and literary evidence regarding the matter.

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[46] K.C. Panigrahi, *History of Orissa (Hindu Period)*, Cuttack, 1981, pp. 69-70.

[47] J. Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, New Delhi, reprint 1973, p. 49.

[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4; M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *Dizionario dell'Induismo*, Roma, 1980, p. 66; D.N. Patnaik, *Festivals of Orissa*, cit., pp. 19-20.

It may be finally pointed out that, in the ancient Indian lunisolar calendar, the spring equinox — roughly coinciding with *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* — is reckoned on the entry of the sun into the *nakṣatra* (lunisolar mansion) of the Kṛttikās, i.e., the Pleiads, identified by the Hindus with the mythical nursemaids of Kārttikeya, and sometimes with the Seven Divine Mothers (Saptamātṛkās) too. The sun is in this case identified with Agni, who, according to a well-known myth contained in the *Mahābhārata*, was accused to have had adulterine sexual intercourse with the Kṛttikās (here personified by the wives of six of the seven Cosmic Seers) after the goddess of sacrificial offering, Svāhā, who was burning with passion for the god, assumed in a succession the form of each of those honourable ladies to make love with him (who was in his turn burning with passion for them). From the seed of Agni was generated Skanda, the god of war, whose nursemaids were the Kṛttikās themselves (for which reason he is also known as Kārttikeya, an epithet meaning 'Associated-with-the-Pleiads'). Therefore, a mythic link between the *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* festival, celebrated when Agni symbolically 'enters' (i.e., makes love with) the Kṛittikās, and the most archaic strata of Śakti cult, represented by the Mātṛkā cult of the pre-proto-historic period, may be found on the astronomical plane too. It has been calculated that the spring equinox sun began to rise in the Pleiads from about 2200 BC.[49]

VĀSANTĪ PŪJĀ AND THE ANNEXED POT-WORSHIP

The worship of the great Goddess in the month of Caitra is a characteristic cultic feature in different States of India besides Orissa. *Vāsantī Pūjā*, the spring worship of Durgā, Gaurī or Annapūrṇā through Tāntric rites, is performed during this month at several Śākta centres both in the all-India context and in Orissa. The antiquity of this worship pattern is proved by its being already mentioned in the *Devī Purāṇa*, a work assignable to the late Gupta age.[50] *Vāsantī-Pūjā* is sometimes referred to as the second annual *Navarātra* (festival of nine nights celebrating the glory of the Devī) after the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā*, but is not so popular as the latter festival, which occurs at an interval of six months from it. In some States, the Hindu womenfolk use to bring in procession the image of goddess Gaurī in the month of Caitra and to make it swing during the festival termed as *Andolaka Mahotsava* (from *dola*, 'swing'). Again Gaurī, the mild and ascetic form of the Devī, is propitiated in her food-bestowing aspect (Annapūrṇā) during the *Gaṇa Gaura* festival, held in her honour in the same month in the Ganges Valley and in Rajasthan. In the city of Udaipur this was once a grand royal festival celebrated with pomp and splendour.[51]

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[49] W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, pp. 112 ff.; S. Kramrisch, *La presenza di Śiva*, Milano, 1999, pp. 386-8 and 431-3.

[50] C.H. Chakravarti, *Tantras: Studies on Their Religion and Literature*, Calcutta, 1972, p. 98, n. 10; W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

In Orissa the *Vāsantī-Pūjā* falls during the cycle of the Caitra festivals. The celebrants entrusted with the performance of the *pūjā* rites are generally brāhmaṇas of the Śākta-Tāntric affiliation, well-versed in the art of *mantra* and *yantra*. The most salient characteristic of this *pūjā* is the adoration of the Devī in the form of a *ghaṭa* or *kalaśa* (a spherical earthen pitcher) filled with water, which, as above stated, is also typically associated with the religious processions held in the State on the occasion of *Daṇḍanāṭa*, *Pāṭuā Yātrā* and *Jhāmu Yātrā* respectively, as well as, it can be added, on that of a number of festivals dedicated to local goddess (*Ṭhākurāṇī Yātrās*) held in different periods of the year. This tradition seems very old in Orissa, being apparently related to the worship of Kumbhamātās, the Goddesses-of-the-Pot constituting, as a whole, a special variant form of village goddesses[52] (*Pl.* XXXII).

To the Indian tribals and semi-tribals, the earthen pot, so important in social and domestic life, is a symbol of fertility and increase. Pot-worship probably started soon after the invention of pottery in the Neolithic age. Among the Saoras, who seem to have deeply influenced the religious culture of the Oriyā villagers in times past, the dedicated pot is an essential element in the ceremonies to avert diseases, to increase the fertility of the land and to honour the dead ancestors; a pot is still used by the modern Hill Saora shamans and shamanins during divination ceremonies.[53] In the archaic Śākta traditions of the non-Āryan peoples, each dedicated pot was regarded as an epiphany of the Goddess' womb, holding the holy sap of life. This sacred object, made of simple earthenware and filled with pure water, has represented in all epochs the quintessence of the water-plus-earth generative principle. In the ancient Tāntric tradition the pot is the first *maṇḍala*, the symbol of the entire universe, the favourite abode of the godhead (particularly when the latter manifests itself as the spirit of the great Goddess).[54] The offering of sacrificial animals before the Goddess of the Pot is the most popular way to periodically renew her fertility power, as it is still today the norm in village Orissa during the month of Caitra.

A pot becomes identified with Durgā and is worshipped by the priests as such also during the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā* as celebrated in North India; this pot is filled with seeds, plants and Ganges water, with this clearly showing that the Goddess of the Pot is regarded as the matrix of all forms of life.

Durgā, then, in the form of the pot, is invoked both as the power promoting the growth

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[51] G.S. Ghurye, *Gods and Men*, Bombay, 1962, pp. 258-60; P. Filippani-Ronconi, *Miti e religioni dell'India*, 2nd edn., Roma, 1992, p. 202.

[52] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-9.

[53] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-202.

[54] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

> of the agricultural grains and as the source of the power of life with which the gods achieved immortality. In the forms of the *navapattrikā* and the *ghaṭa* (pot) Durgā reveals a dimension of herself that primarily has to do with the fertility of the crops and vegetation and with the power that underlies life in general.[55]

The holy *ghaṭa* or *kalaśa*, symbolising the great Goddess of life, death and regeneration, is taken in procession, always accompanied by enthusiastic singing and dancing, at most of the aforesaid *yātrās* (temple festivals) celebrated in Orissa during the month of Caitra. The pot, filled with last year's holy water, is normally preserved in the temple of the folk goddess Maṅgalā. During the allied Śaiva-Śākta festivals of Caitra, it is ceremonially filled with new water without emptying the old to symbolise the eternal renewal of life, which is most visible in the spring season. Other times the pot is buried under the ground to be brought out only the next year, of course always in the month of Caitra. This ritual symbolises the eternal cycle of death and rebirth. The Oriyā low-caste people also use to worship the pot along with the sacred fire-pit of Śiva inside a temporary structure known as *kāmanā-ghara* (house of desires); the pot is in this case termed *kāmanā-ghaṭa* (pitcher of desires). Finally, a smaller pitcher, from which water is made to drain drop by drop through a hole on the sacred *tulasī* plant (*Ocymum sanctum*) installed for worship in every traditional Oriyā house, is the central element of the household rite known as *Vasudhārā* (the stream of the earth), which is customarily performed by the Oriyās on the *Mahāviṣuva Saṁkrānti* day.[56]

The cycle of the Āśvina and Kārttika festivals

The autumnal worship of the Mahādevī as both the representative and the subduer of the evil spirits is a seasonal landmark in the Śākta religion. The utmost importance attached by the Hindu devotees of Orissa to this yearly cycle of Devī-worship is demonstrated by their simply terming it as 'the *Pūjā*' without the addition of any further determinative. The *Pūjā* period roughly runs from the beginning of the *Durgā-Pūjā* proper on the new moon day (*Mahālayā*) in the Hindu month of Āśvina (September-October) to the festival of *Dīpāvalī* (modern form *Divālī*), falling on the new moon day in the month of Kārttika (October-November). The cycle of the *Pūjā* festivals includes the Śākta animal sacrifices and other Tāntric rituals performed on the nights of *Mahāsaptamī*, *Mahāṣṭamī* and *Mahānavamī*; the festival of *Daśaharā*, during which Durgā was once propitiated in order to achieve success in war (this aim has been now replaced by that of success in working activity); the composite festival of *Dīpāvalī*, highlighting both Kālī and Lakṣmī; finally, a fortnight of ancestor-worship known as *pitṛ-pakṣa*. Our discussion will start from this last religious observance so as to point out first the links between the whole set of festivals and the propitiation of ancestral spirits; thereafter, an account of the single festivals will be given.

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[55] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

[56] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-3, 68 and 82; D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

PITṚ-PAKṢA

A lunar fortnight (*pakṣa*) meant for the worship of the dead ancestors (*pitṛs*) is customarily observed by the Oriyā Hindus in the month of Āśvina, even though it can also fall during the month of Kārttika or, more often, in between the two lunar months.[57] Significantly enough, these are the very same months during which the worship of ancestral spirits is performed by tradition by some tribal groups of the Eastern Ghats with dancing, singing and offering-up before the fetish images of the departed souls (often regarded by these tribesmen as dangerous and malevolent beings). The most sanctified among such observances, both memorial and apotropaic in purpose, are respectively found in the religious cultures of the Kondh, Koya, Gond and Bondo tribes.[58] Among the Hill Saoras the very important memorial ceremony in honour of the dead ancestors known as the *Guar* (the most auspicious period for the celebration of which starts from the autumnal season) is associated with the sacrifice of buffaloes.[59] Thus, the ancestor-worship tradition of the Saoras may have somehow influenced the ritual of buffalo-sacrifice as yearly performed by the Śāktas during the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā*. Similarly, also the apotropaic rites performed to propitiate the chthonic forces dwelling in the infernal regions, marking the celebration of the Hindu festival of *Divālī*, may have been influenced by the corresponding spirit-worship rites of the tribals.

> The ancestor-worship among the primitives is often associated with mother goddess and ghost worships for the protection of the crops and propitiation of the evil spirits. . . . In Orissa this function is known as *Gosani Yātrā* or spirit-festival otherwise known among the élites as *Devī Yātrā* or *Pūjā* festival.[60]

In Sanskrit, the term *gosani* means 'acquiring or procuring cattle', for which reason it may be inferred that, in so far as Orissa is concerned, the total designation of the autumnal cycle of Śākta festivals with the expression *Gosani Yātrā* is primarily meant to lay stress on the influence exerted by the spirits of the dead on the crops and cattle according to the religious views of the tribal and semi-tribal people (which remind, as a whole, of the basic belief underlying the ancient Brāhmaṇical sacrificial rite of known as *bali*).

With this discussion on the background, the hypothesis may be put forward that the age-old Brāhmaṇical rite consisting in the evening presentation of a *bali* (sacrificial offering) to the spirits wandering about one's house at night[61] is now partly reproduced in the rite performed every night by the Oriyā Hindus during *pitṛ-pakṣa.* The latter rite consists in the offering of a perforated earthen pot, fixed to a pole and containing a lamp, to the spirits of the dead ancestors as a help-guide in their annual descent toward their respective former villages and homes, which is supposed to occur in that fortnight; in the meanwhile, the celebrant lights a bunch of jute-stalks with the invocation 'Oh! the ancestors come in the darkness and go in the light'.[62] The purpose underlying this Hindu rite of ancestor-worship appears very similar to that underlying the tribal megalithic rites for the propitiation of the ancestors, namely, to appease the spirits of the dead by giving them a temporary seat on the earth in the course of their tormented journey to their definitive abodes in the underworld, thus, preventing them from afflicting their descendants or the members of other lineages with evil influences. The most important Austro-Asiatic-speaking tribes of Orissa that have preserved traits of this archaic megalithic culture are the Mundas, the Hos, the Gadabas, the Hill Saoras, the Bondos, just to mention some among them. The Gonds settled in northern and western Orissa, who presently speak Dravidian or Indo-Āryan dialects, likewise maintain some elements of their old megalithic traditions.

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[57] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 77; D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

[58] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 77.

[59] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-60.

[60] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 77.

[61] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

DIVĀLĪ AND KĀLĪ-PŪJĀ

Divālī or the festival of lamps, coinciding in West Bengal and Orissa with the celebration of the autumnal *Kālī-Pūjā*, appears to have a direct connection with the above-mentioned indigenous traditions of ancestor-worship and spirit-worship; consequently, for a question of method, this festival will be here treated before the *Durgā-Pūjā*, although the dates scheduled for the celebration of the latter festival precede of a few weeks the ones scheduled for the celebration of *Divālī*.

Divālī is the modern form of the Sanskrit term *dīpāvalī*, meaning 'a row of lamps': in fact, the most conspicuous ritualistic feature of this new-moon festival, celebrated all over India from the fourteenth to the fifteenth dark *tithi*s (lunar dates) of the month of Kārttika, is the 'offering of lights' to propitiate Naraka, an *asura* conceived since Vedic times as a personification of the hell itself (meant by the Hindus as a dark and bottomless abyss reserved to the eternal punishment of the evil ones, particularly those belonging to the human stock).[63] This rite symbolises the conquest of light over darkness and of good over evil.

In Orissa, the chthonic and ultramundane powers symbolically personified by Naraka are propitiated on the first day of the festival with nocturnal lighting of clay lamps on the top of all temples, buildings and houses, as well as with the offering of sugar-canes and other ripe fruits to the dead ancestors. The apotropaic use of firelight as a means to attract and, immediately after that, drive away the returned spirits of the dead has an evident relation with the rites in honour of the forefathers performed by the Oriyā villagers during the fortnight of ancestor-worship known as *pitṛ-pakṣa* (which, as above indicated, is observed during the month preceding the celebration of *Divālī*). The returned spirits of the dead, personified as evil ghosts, are symbolically driven away during the festival by exploding fire-works and making a terrible din with pots and pans and musical instruments.

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[62] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

[63] P. Filippani-Ronconi, *op. cit.*, p. 203; M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, pp. 115 and 299-300; S. Kramrisch, *op. cit.*, p. 418.

Some Orissan scholars are of the opinion that the *Divālī* festival may have originated within the Jaina fold.[64] Such a hypothesis does not appear to be peregrine or groundless, as the ancient Jainas used to build and consecrate lamp-supporting pillars (*dīpa-stambhas*)[65] which were, in all likelihood, very similar in concept and shape to the ones being still today erected by the Oriyās during *pitṛ-pakṣa*. The ritual offering of such lamps might have some bearing to the *Divālī* festival of the Hindus.

If what earlier stated with reference to the origin and significance of the forms of ancestor-worship prevailing in Orissa during the autumnal season holds good, one should expect to find in the *Divālī* festival some link with the cultus of Mother Earth as fashioned in primitive megalithic cultures. Such a link does exist, being formed by the adoration of Kālī during the festival. That is why *Divālī*, a festival that, elsewhere in India, is chiefly dedicated to Lakṣmī, is better known in Bengal and coastal Orissa as *Kālī-Pūjā* — a name indicating its primary linkage to the Śākta cultic complex.

The usage of building and worshipping huge wood and clay images of Kālī on *Divālī* (or *Dīpāvalī Amāvasyā*) certainly come into vogue in Orissa after the analogous usage became prevalent in Bengal,[66] even though the historical period in which this ritualistic pattern developed in Bengal cannot be determined on a clear chronological basis. No reference to such a worship pattern has been traced so far in any literary work previous to the eighteenth century AD,[67] which circumstance, nevertheless, does not exclude at all the possibility of an ancient origin of this festival. *Kālī-Pūjā*, in fact, appears to have originated as a folk or non-Brāhmaṇical religious observance, as is demonstrated by the animal sacrifices performed on a mass scale on this occasion by the Beṅgālī Śāktas; therefore, one should not be surprised at finding no mention of this religious festival in old Sanskrit texts. Some scholars even esteem *Kālī-Pūjā* to be the Hinduised remnant of an ancient Buddhist festival,[68] which fact may explain why the festival is never mentioned by medieval Sanskrit authors.

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[64] R.N. Dash, 'Fasts and Festivals of Orissa', in H.C. Das, ed., *Cultural Heritage of Orissa*, pp. 192-3.

[65] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

[66] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[67] C.H. Chakravarti, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-2.

[68] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 193.

Whatever may be the origin of this worship, it appears clear that goddess Kālī is greatly revered on *Divālī* on account of her link with the spirits of the dead, who are said to return and visit the earth during the three days of this festival. In India, all new moon nights are sacred to the dead ancestors inasmuch as there is a belief that, on such nights, the moon gets thoroughly emptied from the ancestral spirits residing on it, who in this way are 'awakened' and 'put into action'. Besides this, all new moon nights are sacred to goddess Kālī as well; yet, the *Dīpāvalī Amāvasyā* night, regarded by the Hindus as the darkest night in the year, is even more sacred to her: this night is, in fact, a very crucial and dangerous moment of the year because of the free wandering of spirits and shades on the earth, so that Mother Kālī — within whose black womb the 'aquatic' and 'lunar' dimension peopled with ghosts and demons is believed to be contained — is invoked and worshipped on this occasion as the only one who can rescue mankind from the impeding awe-inspiring menace coming from the under-world.[69]

In Orissa the autumnal rites of *Kālī-Pūjā* are presently observed at *Divālī* in the most ceremonious way, thus, attracting a larger number of pilgrims, at Bhadrakālī temple near Bhadrak (Baleswar district) and at Śyāmakālī temple at Puri, where the festival is celebrated with grandeur. A large crowd of devotees gather every year at these eminent Śākta-Vaiṣṇava sanctuaries — by far the most important among those dedicated to Kālī on the Orissan soil — to be present at the ceremonies held during this *pūjā*.[70] At the shrine of Bhadrakālī animal sacrifices are performed on this occasion for general well-being. Besides, wood and clay images of Kālī are put in worship at *Divālī* in many towns, villages and shrines of Orissa.

The second aspect of *Divālī*, namely, the worship of Lakṣmī (which is far more typical of this festival if one takes into account the all-India context, and not only the particular cases represented by Bengal and Orissa), is associated with a set of myths that, on the analogy of the religious beliefs underlying the celebration of *Kālī-Pūjā*, lay stress on the prominent part taken by chthonic and infernal powers and by the manes of the deceased in the genesis and the subsequent observance of this festival. This aspect of the festival, being dominated by the figure of the Vaiṣṇava goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī, appears to have undergone a more radical process of Sanskritisation than its Kālī-worship aspect.

The leading male character of the festival of *Divālī* as it is observed by the worshippers of Lakṣmī is the *asura* Bali, who can be considered as a variant form of the *asura* Naraka (to whom the offering of lamps characterising the festival is made) in that he, like the latter, is the lord of the infernal regions. Bali was sunk down into the nether-world by Viṣṇu, having incarnated as Vāmana (the Dwarf) to defeat him. He was, at any rate, a very virtuous *asura*, so much so that, as it is stated in the *Mahābhārata* and in some Purāṇas, the goddess of good fortune herself, Śrī-Lakṣmī, joined him along with her attendant auspicious virtues during the early ages at the beginning of the world. Even Bali succeeded in replacing Indra for sometime in the role as the lord of the three worlds, and he made the universe to prosper under his virtuous rule; but when he lost his fortune and was defeated by Viṣṇu, Śrī-Lakṣmī forsook him, leaving him powerless.[71] This original mythic nucleus was subsequently changed by some Purāṇic authors with depicting Lakṣmī as a captive of Bali in the under-world, from which she was freed thanks to the victorious intervention of Viṣṇu over the demon.[72] At any rate, Bali was permitted by the gods to emerge from the infernal regions and rule again over the world for three days every year at the time of *Dīpāvalī Amāvasyā*. Ever after, the Hindus have believed him to come out of hell in autumn along with his retinue of returned dead, ghosts, goblins and malevolent spirits, causing anxiety among the living every year on the eve of the *Divālī* festival. This being the context, who else but goddess Lakṣmī — who, as stated in some Hindu holy scriptures, once dwelt with Bali, and is, thus, esteemed to know his power very well — can be invoked to ward off the dangerous effects of the return of the demon king and his hosts?[73]

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[69] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. Veda e antico Induismo*, Milano, 1981, p. 189 and n. 25; Id., *Le religioni dell'India. L'Induismo recente*, p. 346.

[70] G.P. Patnaik, 'Places of Interest in Balasore District', in S. Pani and H.C. Das, eds., *Glimpses of History and Culture of Balasore*, Bhubaneswar, 1988, p. 168.

It will appear clear now that, in the Vaiṣṇava perspective, Lakṣmī's mythical relationship with Bali represents the exact equivalent of Kālī's cultic association with the spirits of the under-world, which, unlike the former, originated in a purely Śākta context with some important contributions from the tribal cultures of eastern India. To pay homage to both goddess Lakṣmī and the demon Bali at *Divālī* is just another way to express the archaic idea that the great Goddess is the supreme guardian of the evil spirits and chthonic entities in that she shares in their *āsurik* nature. Although this belief may appear less evident in the case of Lakṣmī than in that of Kālī, the myths concerning the ancient cohabitation of Lakṣmī and Bali in the bowels of the earth testify to the truthfulness of this thesis.

The odd and sometimes obscene folk ritual customs observed in different parts of India during the celebrations of *Divālī*, such as the pursuit of young girls by boys showing off their penis, the procession of prostitutes, the ritual sport consisting in driving bullocks mad, the gamblings accompanied by dancing and intoxication, aim in all evidence at reviving the mythic age in which the *asura*s ruled over the three worlds with Bali at the apex and the *dharma* principles established by the *deva*s had still to replace the primordial state of chaos.[74] In one sense, the liturgical free-setting of Bali with his infernal retinue is the same as rousing the pre-Vedic anti-gods who embodied the mysterious forces of nature, presiding over generation and death. It appears, therefore, quite logical that the great Goddess, having long since absorbed into her complex personality the primitive cults centred round the worship of natural powers, is invoked and propitiated at *Divālī* to tame the spirits of chaos and restore the upset *dharma* rules.

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[71] A. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, New York, 1964, pp. 141 and 169-70; D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[72] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. L'Induismo recente*, p. 348.

[73] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-4.

[74] P. Filippani-Ronconi, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-4.

However, with giving Lakṣmī the pre-eminence in the celebration of *Divālī*, the Vaiṣṇava ruling classes of India obscured, at least in part, the real meaning of the association of the worship of the Mahādevī with that of the dead ancestors, which had characterised the original form of the festival. *Divālī* was, thus, changed by degrees into an end-of-the-year festivity believed to bring in fortune, happiness, wealth and prosperity, viz., the qualities embodied at best by goddess Lakṣmī. As a result of this, it has now become a custom for merchants and businessmen to worship their account books at *Divālī*; for farmers, to worship their crops, dunghills and cattle; for people of all walks of life, to gamble, feast, spend a lot of money and bury old enmities. It is understood that goddess Lakṣmī will bless the future activities of all these people with success. Merchants and businessmen are particularly fond of *Divālī* because some Vaiṣṇava sacred texts relate that Viṣṇu created it as the special festival of the vaiśyas. Finally, it must be pointed out that, in the Vaiṣṇava perspective, the ritual lighting of lamps, so characteristic of the *Divālī* festival, is believed to banish Alakṣmī, the malignant sister of Lakṣmī symbolising ill-fortune. Thus, also the ancient rite of the lighting of lamps has been somehow 'Vaiṣṇavised' in course of time.[75]

DURGĀ-PŪJĀ AND THE SACRIFICE OF THE BUFFALO

In the cyclic order of annual festivals, *Durgā-Pūjā* comes earlier than *Divālī* and *Kālī-Pūjā*. In spite of this, since the festivals of *Divālī* and *Kālī-Pūjā*, which are also a part of the annual ancestor-worship ceremonies, are connected with the *pitṛ-pakṣa* (which starts from the day of *Mahālayā*), I have deemed it wise to discuss here *Divālī* and *Kālī-Pūjā* first, before the *Durgā-Pūjā* festival.

The worship of Durgā in the bright fortnight of the month of Āśvina is no doubt the most important and popular Śākta religious festival among those observed on a pan-Indian scale. The festival is generally known as *Durgā-Pūjā* in eastern India and as *Navarātra* (festival of the nine nights) in the rest of the country. This is due to the fact that the original festival of four days celebrated in honour of Durgā has enlarged its duration up to nine days in the all-India context so as to make a grand festive introduction to the celebration of *Daśaharā* or *Vijayadaśamī*, the festive day commemorating the victory of Rāma over the demon Rāvaṇa, which is generally considered the tenth and conclusive day of the festival.[76] But the worship of goddess Durgā is not always a part of the *Daśaharā* celebrations in certain parts of North

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[75] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-4; J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 347; D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-1.

[76] C.H. Chakravarti, *op. cit.*, p. 97; G.S. Ghurye, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

India, where *Daśaharā* has progressively obtained an independent status and is now celebrated as *Rāmalīlā* (ritual staging of the military deeds of Lord Rāma) with great religious homages and processions.[77]

A discussion of the great Devī festival of Āśvina must, therefore, start from the proper Śākta nucleus of *Navarātra*, i.e., the three *tithis* (lunar dates) culminating in the animal sacrifices of *Mahāṣṭamī*, to be subsequently integrated with some hints on the historical and mythological links between the military-royal festival of *Daśaharā* and the worship of the great Goddess.

It is not known for a certainty when and where the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā* originated in its present forms. In Bengal, regarded as one of its ancient centres of diffusion, the earliest literary evidence of the observance of *Durgā-Pūjā* dates from the eleventh-twelfth centuries AD; since that time onwards, the Durgā, Caṇḍī, Kālī and Cāmuṇḍā components of the festival have been increasingly highlighted in that region of India.[78]

Some scholars trace the origin of this festival to the spirit-worship tradition (allied with some primitive form of Śakti cult) prevalent in the same period of the year among the aboriginal peoples of southern and eastern India, including the tribal belts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.[79] The main evidence supporting this thesis would be the ritual custom of sacrificing to the great Goddess a very elevated number of animals on this occasion. The buffalo, the sacrificial animal *par excellence* at the time of *Durgā-Pūjā*, also acts as the chief sacrificial animal among many non-Āryan tribal peoples, particularly during the memorial ceremonies prescribed for the propitiation of the dead. Moreover, during this autumnal festival Durgā is above all worshipped as the inaccessible Goddess of the Mountain, a deity of the *asuras*,[80] with this testifying to the *Durgā-Pūjā*'s linkage to pre-Vedic cultures.

A sort of invisible thread seems to have united from very early times the terrific forms of the Devī having evolved out of the non-Āryan (Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic) cultures of India, the mythological motif of Durgā slaying the buffalo-demon, the practice of buffalo-sacrifice (which appears to be a ritual reiteration of the slaying of the buffalo-demon at Durgā's hand) and the religious beliefs about the exorcisation of evil spirits. This appears specially true in such regions as Bengal and Orissa, both of which have been influenced by age-old tribal religious traditions to a much greater extent than other areas of the Indian sub-continent.

That the cult of Durgā or Caṇḍī is the result of a process of coalescence of several local

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77. J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-50.

78. C.H. Chakravarti, *op. cit.*, pp. 98 and 100; G.S. Ghurye, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

79. R.N. Dash, '*Folk Festivals of Orissa — A Study*', pp. 77-8.

80. B. Bhattacharya, *Śaivism and the Phallic World*, New Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta, 1975, I, p. 281.

goddess-cults based on similar mythological conceptions, is a fact upon which most of the scholars in the history of the Śākta religion agree. In particular, the ferocious, destructive and warlike side of the personality of the Devī as the slayer of the buffalo-demon appears to have gradually developed starting from the basic cult picture of a certain number of non-Āryan goddesses who were originally worshipped in the forest-clad mountain tracts of Middle India. In the two *Durgā-stotras* of the *Mahābhārata*, a goddess simply mentioned as Devī is described as a dweller in the mysterious and frightful jungles situated on the slopes of the Vindhya mountains. Like many tribal female deities or spirits, this goddess is said in this text to be fond of meat and wine. The *Āryā-stava* included in the *Harivaṁśa* suggests that this deity was specially worshipped by the hunting non-Āryan tribes, and also that the cultus paid to her by the Āryans under the Sanskrit name of Vindhyavāsinī (the Guardian-of-the-Vindhyas) was, by the time of composition of this Purāṇa, already popular all over civilised India.[81] Also some early Tamil texts, composed in the first centuries of the Christian era and, therefore, roughly belonging to the same epoch of the *Durgā-stotras* and the *Harivaṁśa*, describe a variety of dreadful goddesses, including Durgā, who were associated with demons, forest spirits, oblations of blood and flesh and the sacrifice of buffaloes. These goddesses, in certain cases supposed to be married with Śiva, are often credited with a warlike character.[82]

In the course of the Sanskritisation process by means of which these ancient Munda and Dravidian goddesses were incorporated into the Brāhmaṇical pantheon, their blood-thirsty and violent character was counterbalanced by that of a number of more benevolent goddesses associated with Śiva or, in the alternative, with Viṣṇu. Yet the figure of the Mahādevī, the final outcome of this process, maintained, in virtue of her composite origin, a blood-thirsty and violent side which, starting from the Gupta age, found a concrete expression in myths, iconography and ritual practices. Also the practice of sacrificing a buffalo to Durgā on the occasion of her autumnal worship is supposed to be part of the non-Āryan heritage of Śakti cult.

According to some early medieval Sanskrit texts, the tribes of Middle India worshipped their goddesses in mountainous tracts with dreadful rites that included the immolation of human beings and of buffaloes (the latter possibly representing a substitute for the former).[83] The religious sanction behind this was probably that all blood is ultimately human blood, and that every form of blood sacrifice is assimilable to the sacrifice of human beings. According to such a view, actual human sacrifice is but the most extreme method resorted to by man to ritually reproduce the image of the primeval cosmic sacrifice through which the entire universe was created. This belief makes the Śākta doctrine of sacrifice virtually equal to the sacrificial doctrines of some of the Munda and Dravidian tribes of India. Tribal mind in India is still today saturated in the idea that the earth cries for blood, and that the outpouring of blood will bring fertility and plenty. If man wants fertility and plenty, he must imitate the godhead's self-sacrifice by offering blood to his elect deity.

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[81] A.K. Bhattacharya, 'A Nonaryan Aspect of the Devī', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *The Śakti Cult and Tārā*, Calcutta, 1967, pp. 56-8.

[82] T.V. Mahalingam, 'The Cult of Śakti in Tamilnad', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 18-21; N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 58-61.

[83] A.K. Bhattacharya, *art. cit.*, pp. 58-9; A Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadī I. Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra*, Chicago and London, 1988, p. 175.

The Śākta tradition of buffalo-sacrifice appears to bear a direct connection with the myth of Durgā killing the buffalo-demon. It is known that the earliest images of Mahiṣamardinī, dating from the Kuṣāna period, depict the goddess as engaged in breaking the spine of a theriomorphic buffalo-demon, and not as beheading him as attested in the *Devī-Māhātmya*. The very term *mardinī* is derived from the Sanskrit root *mṛd-*, meaning 'to press violently' or also 'to crush'.[84] Yet the motif of Durgā beheading the buffalo-demon with her sword was canonised in the Gupta age as the most perfect iconic representation of both the myth narrated in the *Devī-māhātmya* and the ultimate message of the Brāhmaṇical doctrine of sacrifice. Ever after, the iconography of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā was constantly characterised by the motif of the decapitation of the buffalo-demon. In accordance with this trend, the Śākta tradition of buffalo-sacrifice takes the decapitation of the latter animal to be the most correct way to satisfy the Devī on the occasion of her autumnal festival.

With this discussion at the background, the traditional fashions of performing the sacrifice of the buffalo on the occasion of *Durgā-Pūjā* will be now expounded with special reference to Orissa.

It must be first of all pointed out that the ritual practice of buffalo-sacrifice, when compared with the adoration of huge Durgā idols which is current in many Orissan towns during *Durgā-Pūjā*, appears to be much more rooted in the indigenous traditions of the State than the latter. Worship for five days of lavishly decorated ten-armed clay images of Durgā slaying Mahiṣāsura, which are first installed in special pavilions to be subsequently brought in procession to some tank or river bank and finally immersed in water, appears, as a matter of fact, to be a cult practice only recently introduced from Bengal. This form of adoration of the Goddess was possibly adopted in Orissan towns in the period of the British domination.[85] The same can be said with reference to the custom, rather diffused in present-day Orissa, of paying homage to the images of Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya (conceived as Durgā's sons) and to those of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī (conceived as Durgā's daughters), placed on either side of the image of Mahiṣamardinī representing the central object of worship during the festival.

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[84] U.N. Dhal, *Mahiṣāsura in Art and Thought*, Delhi, 1991, p. 66.

[85] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

Generally the *pūjā* proper continues for four days from *Mahāsaptamī* to *Daśaharā*. The images of Durgā are worshipped in the city streets as well as at most of the Śākta shrines of Orissa, including the *grāma-devatā* ones. The ceremonies are often spectacular and conducted with great pomp. Hindu devotees of all creed offer rice, milk and sweetmeats to the great goddess all through the term of the *pūjā* while vegetable offerings are specially made to her by the married women in order to obtain children in return.[86]

Some *Smṛti-śāstras* of Orissa testify to the observance of this festival in the later medieval period.[87] During the period of reign of the last Gaṅga monarchs (fourteenth-fifteenth centuries AD) *Durgā-Pūjā* gained prominence as the greatest national festival of Orissa.[88] Yet the festival, as celebrated in Orissa in earlier times, must have been chiefly pivoted upon the sacrifice of the buffalo on the *Mahāṣṭamī* night. The Tāntric form of sacrifice based on bloodshed appears, indeed, to abide by the archaic Śākta sacrificial tradition to a greater extent than the Brāhmaṇical *pūjā* forms, exclusively vegetarian in character, which nowadays prevail all over Orissa in the celebrations of *Durgā-Pūjā*. The ritual killing of the buffalo by decapitation is still performed at a small number of Śākta temples in the State, all dedicated to one or another terrific manifestation of the great Goddess, by non-brāhmaṇa celebrants, generally belonging to a śūdra caste (or, in some cases, to a kṣatriya caste too). In the temples dedicated to the peaceful forms of the Devī, on the contrary, blood is never shed during *Durgā-Pūjā*. The Goddess there receives strictly vegetarian offerings only.

However, the buffalo-sacrifice tradition is now slowly vanishing in Orissa as elsewhere in India. The sacrifice by decapitation of a large number of goats and sheep has long since replaced that of the buffalo at most of the Śākta temples existing in the State (it is impossible here to mention all the places where these mass slaughters of animals are presently carried out). The animals offered to the Devī by her devotees are usually bound to a *yūpa* (sacrificial pillar) situated before a Devī temple; in some cases, such as at Bāliharacaṇḍī temple on the seashore near Puri, the *yūpa* has been anthropomorphised through the addition of three eyes and a lolling tongue, with this obviously reminding of an image of goddess Kālī. In a few cases, an animal hecatomb is achieved at *Mahāṣṭamī*, after which the meat of goats, sheep and fowls is cooked and consumed by all the devotees as *prasāda* (holy food).

As regards the Śākta shrines of Orissa belonging to the group of eight Caṇḍī *pīṭhas* officially recognised by the regional Hindu tradition (see chapter 3), the ritual killing of a buffalo is presently observed during the *Durgā-Pūjā* at the temples of Virajā of Jajpur,

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[86] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Boudh-Khondmals District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1983, p. 90; R.N. Dash, 'Fasts and Festivals of Orissa', p. 190.

[87] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 5 (from the Foreword by R.R. Das).

[88] *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts of Orissa,* vol. V: Tantra Manuscripts, compiled by M.P. Dash, Bhubaneswar, 1965, p. XLVIII.

Carcikā of Banki and Bhagavatī of Banpur only. An account of the rituals performed at each of these three shrines has been already given in chapter 3.

The case of Virajā appears very interesting since she is the oldest among the eight prominent Caṇḍīs of Orissa; moreover, she has been associated from the hoary past with the worship of the dead ancestors. The buffalo-sacrifice performed in Āśvina at this very ancient Śākta *pīṭha*, which is also included among the eminent *śrāddha-tīrtha*s of India (the places recommended in Purāṇic texts for the performance of the *śrāddha* ceremony, an oblation to the dead ancestors and relatives),[89] suggests that the cultic link between the worship of Mother Earth and that of the ancestral spirits, expressed in pre- and proto-historic times by the megalithic rituals associated with buffalo-sacrifice, has become an integral part of Śakti cult in this area of coastal Orissa. However, since the cult of Virajā underwent the influence of Vaiṣṇavism from the Gaṅga period onwards, on the *Mahānavamī* night at midnight, when the buffalo must be slain in accordance with the local tradition, the main portal of the temple of the goddess is closed to prevent her from 'witnessing' the profanation of the pureness of her shrine with bloodshed. According to the local priests, the animal's blood is not directly offered to the image of Mahiṣamardinī presiding over the temple, but rather to an image of Aja-Ekapāda Bhairava serving as the western *pārśva-devatā* of the same.

At the temple of goddess Carcikā at Banki the head and a portion of the blood of the slain buffalo are, on the contrary, offered to the presiding goddess of the shrine, who is a form of Cāmuṇḍā, the blood-thirsty aspect of the Devī *par excellence*. At the temple of Bhagavatī at Banpur, whose presiding goddess can be considered a form of Kālī or of Bhairavī, hundreds of goats are sacrificed in addition to one buffalo; their blood, peculiarly enough, is then mixed with rice to obtain pellets that are consumed by the devotees as *prasāda*. Another eminent Caṇḍī *pīṭha* of Orissa at which buffalo-sacrifice is stated by local priests to have been once in vogue is the temple of Samalei at Sambalpur, whose presiding goddess, aniconic in form, is represented by a large block of stone having a protuberance regarded as Kālī's standard protruding tongue. As regards the remaining five important Śākta *pīṭha*s of coastal Orissa discussed in chapter 3, nothing can be said for a certainty about the possible observance there of the ritual of buffalo-sacrifice in times past.

Coming now to some minor Śākta shrines of inner Orissa, the sacrifice of the buffalo is still performed on the *Mahāṣṭamī* night, or was so until recent times, in temples presided over by goddesses associated with royal or kṣatriya cults. These are the temples of goddess Laṅkesvarī at Junagarh, the original family deity of the Nāga dynasty of Kalahandi, in the medieval period occasionally propitiated with human sacrifices too;[90] of Baṛārāul, a Hinduised

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[89] V.S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa — A Study*, Varanasi, 1963, pp. 113-5.

[90] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Kalahandi District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1980, pp. 53, 117 and 449.

Kondh goddess worshipped in the shape of a block of stone in the villages of Balaskumpa and Bandhagarh in Phulbani district, to whom the *Meriah* sacrifice was once offered and before whom the buffalo is now killed by a Kondh and a kṣatriya priest jointly;[91] of Baralā Devī, a form of the pillar-goddess Stambheśvarī greatly revered by the tribals and the kṣatriyas settled in the district of Phulbani;[92] of Kanaka Durgā of Jaypur in Koraput district, the tutelary deity of the old local *rāj* family, to whom, prior to the arrival of the British, not only buffaloes, but also human beings were sacrificed during the *Durgā-Pūjā.*[93]

It is worth noticing, to conclude, that the sacrifice of a buffalo at *Mahāṣṭamī* is still in vogue especially at Śākta shrines located in western and south-western Orissa (viz., the old districts of Kalahandi, Koraput, Phulbani and Ganjam), namely, in the ancient areas of settlement of the Kondh, Gond, Gadaba and Saora tribes.

DAŚAHARĀ AND ITS LINKS WITH DURGĀ-PŪJĀ

The formerly royal festival called *Daśaharā* or *Dasarā* (Anglicised form Dusserah), which currently marks the conclusion of the celebrations of the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā*, was primarily an occasion for impenetrating success in military activities in the forthcoming winter season and to celebrate the rites of preparation to war. The month of Kārttika (October-November), beginning soon after *Daśaharā*, has been taken from time immemorial by the Indian peoples as the most suitable period for undertaking military expeditions on account of its heralding the advent of the cool and dry period of the year after the rainy season. Furthermore, on the very first full moon day following *Daśaharā*, known in Orissa as *Kumāra Pūrṇimā*, an astronomical conjunction considered very favourable to military success occurs: on that day, indeed, the full moon, when high in the sky, is very close to the *nakṣatra* of the Kṛttikās, i.e., the astral projection of the mythical nursemaids of the Hindu god of war Kārttikeya. This autumnal conjunction was once regarded by the Hindu warriors as the most propitious celestial sign under which undertaking a military expedition.[94]

The end-of-the-year military operations were subject, in times gone by, to the direct protection of the Goddess in her warlike, non-vegetarian and virginal aspect. The fact is that the goddess — particularly in her manifestation as Durgā, when she is shown in full military array as slaying the *asura* Mahiṣa — was believed to defend the cosmic order exactly the same way as a king was entrusted with the defence of the mundane one. Therefore, the festival of *Daśaharā*, coinciding in most cases with the celebrations in honour of the tutelary goddesses of the Hindu royal families, was also the chief ceremonial occasion of the year for rendering homage and worship the king's armies and their weapons. The feudatory chiefs of the medieval Hindu kingdoms and principalities used to reconfirm every year their loyalty to their respective sovereigns with attending the celebrations of *Daśaharā* before marching for battle.[95]

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[91] Id., eds., *Boudh-Khondmals District Gazetteer*, pp. 373-4.

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 88.

[93] N. Senapati and N.K. Sahu, eds., *Koraput District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1966, pp. 139-40.

[94] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

The yearly animal sacrifices performed during the *Durgā-Pūjā* as well as their religio-cultural background, constituted by the myth of Durgā's sanguinary combat with Mahiṣāsura, quite well harmonised with the military nature of the *Daśaharā* festival.

> Indeed, the two festivals, *Navarātra* [known as *Durgā-Pūjā* in eastern India] and *Dasarā*, probably were often understood to be one continuous festival in which the worship of Durgā and the hope of military success were inseparably linked.[96]

According to H. von Stietencron, the interplay of Śakti cult and royal authority was one of the main factors which led to the growth, under royal patronage and as a part of the Śākta-oriented *bhakti* movement, of the cult of a buffalo-killing goddess all over India between the ninth and sixteenth centuries AD.[97] The festival of *Daśaharā*, with super-imposing a royal form of Śakti-worship on the more primitive regional forms of goddess-worship pivoted upon the sacrifice of the buffalo at the close of the month of Āśviṇa, played an important role in the Āryanisation of tribal female-oriented cults, linking the Sanskritised concept about one universal Śakti to a great deal of regional goddesses. The military ceremonies of *Daśaharā*, indeed, conciliate the bloody ritual practices characterising the most archaic non-Āryan forms of Śakti-worship with the chivalrous ideology imbued with mysticism characterising the kṣatriya culture.[98]

The mythic origin of *Daśaharā*, as given in the Purāṇas, is closely related to both the figure of the Mahādevī and that of Rāma, Viṣṇu's royal and epic *avatāra*. The term *Daśaharā* can be translated as 'the tenth *tithi* (in the bright fortnight of Āśvina) consecrated to Harā (the divine spouse of Hara or Śiva)';[99] yet, an alternative and equally popular name of this festival, *Vijayadaśamī* (Victory-Tenth-Day), lays greater stress upon the mythical victory of Lord Rāma over the demon king Rāvaṇa, forming the culminating episode of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The second term reflects, much more than the former, the process of Vaiṣṇavisation undergone by the festival starting from the later medieval period.

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[95] M. Biardeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-9.

[96] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-1.

[97] H. von Stietencron, 'Die Göttin Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī: Mythos, Darstellung und geschichtliche Rolle bei der Hinduisierung Indiens', in *Visible Religion: Annual for Religious Iconography, Vol. II: Representations of Gods*, Leiden, 1983, pp. 137-40.

[98] J. Varenne, *Le Tantrisme. La sexualité transcendée*, Paris, 1977, p. 65.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Several Purāṇic works relate how, on this very day, Rāma defeated and killed Rāvaṇa with the aid of Durgā, whom he had propitiated before leading his monkey-army in the invasion of Laṅkā, the capital of Rāvaṇa; however, it needs to be specified here that no reference to such an episode is found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s original version, attributed to Vālmīki.

> It is stated that Brahmā awakened the deity [Durgā] during the night time of the gods, with a view to seeking favour for Rāma to kill Rāvaṇa. The goddess rose from her sleep in the bright half of the month of Āśvina and went to the city of Laṅkā, where Rāma was already present. Going there, she engaged Rāma and Rāvaṇa in fighting, while she herself remained invisible. While she looked on the game of fighting, the gods worshipped her for seven nights. When Rāvaṇa was killed on the ninth day of the month the great grandfather of the people, Brahmā, offered special worship to Durgā along with all the gods. Then, on the tenth day, the goddess was sent back to her abode with festivities fitting the occasion.[100]

A similar story is also recorded in the Beṅgālī version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* written by Kṛttivāsa (fifteenth century AD), which is still very popular in eastern India. The attempt to associating Śāktism with the Rāma-Sītā legends is also present in Sāralā Dāsa's Oriyā version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (fifteenth century AD), in which the great Śākta poet follows a Kashmirian Śākta tradition according to which it was Sītā herself, identified with the Mahādevī, who killed Rāvaṇa after having assumed the form of Kālī (of Bhadrakālī in Sāralā Dāsa's version). The common purpose of this kind of regional variants of the classic Rāma-Sītā legends was to find a compromise with the Śākta devotees, who in the later medieval period were enormously increasing their number, particularly in eastern India.[101] In this connection, it must be noticed that a number of later Śākta temples of Orissa are dedicated to goddess Rāmacaṇḍī, the epiphany of the Devī as the supreme aider of Rāma in his final struggle with Rāvaṇa. Laṅkeśvarī, a goddess worshipped from very early times at Sonepur and in the Tel Valley (north-western Orissa), can be likewise considered to be a form of the goddess honoured by Rāma and, at the same time, by Rāvaṇa (her name means, in fact, the Lady-of-Laṇkā, that is, the presiding deity of Rāvaṇa's capital).

Nowadays, the Orissan town where the *Daśaharā* festival is celebrated with the greatest pomp, splendour and expenditure of money is Cuttack, which served as the main political and administrative centre of Orissa for about one thousand years till 1948, when the capital of Orissa was shifted to Bhubaneswar. Yet, till the end of the princely rule over the country, military power and royal authority were extolled with great show and magnificence at

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[100] C.H. Chakravarti, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-7.

[101] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

Daśaharā also in some ex-States of western and south-western Orissa, which were then, and still now are, the less modernised areas in the country. Especially in the cities of Jaypur in Koraput district, Bhawanipatna and Khariar in Kalahandi district, and Baudh in Phulbani district, this festival was once observed in honour of the respective tutelary goddesses of the local *rāj* families with grandiose processions and spectacular animal hecatombs.

It may be furthermore inferred that, during the early medieval period, the *Daśaharā* festival was observed with great military homages also at Jajpur, the seat of goddess Virajā, which served in those times (eighth-eleventh centuries AD) as the capital of the Bhauma-karas and the Somavaṁśīs. This may be evinced by the traditional performance of a martial-like ceremony consisting in the shooting of an arrow to each of the four directions from an elevated platform (on which the processional image of Virajā has been placed) at the close of the celebrations of *Durgā-Pūjā* at Jajpur. This rite, performed soon after the midnight preceding *Daśaharā*, is immediately followed by the sacrifice of one buffalo, with which it appears to be closely connected from a ritualistic viewpoint. A large image of Kārttikeya, the god of war, is installed at the shooting site. The shooting ceremony is, significantly enough, still today performed in an open field (to the north-east of Virajā temple) that is believed to be situated just in between the two sites at which the royal palace of the Bhauma-karas and that of the Somavaṁśīs respectively rose. The practice of shooting near the old palace area of Jajpur, associated with the joint worships of Durgā and Kārttikeya, is evidently reminiscent of a rich political and military heritage combined with the celebration of *Daśaharā* at the shrine of Virajā, the tutelary goddess of the early medieval monarchs of Kaliṅga.[102]

In their heyday, the rulers, military commanders and simple soldiers of the Kaliṅga country used to worship ceremoniously their weapons at *Daśaharā*. This tradition still survives in the ritual polish and worship of the sword, shield, spear, etc. — altogether representing Durgā, the goddess of army — by the *khaṇḍāyats* (a caste of warriors) and by other upper castes of Orissa on the occasion of this festival.[103] The Oriyās used in the past to start their military training as well as their sea voyages from the day of *Daśaharā*. On this occasion, particularly during the Imperial Gaṅga period, the officials and warriors were invited to the capital of Orissa to exhibit their war techniques before the king and his courtiers who, in recognition of their heroic deeds, awarded them military titles, land grants and gold coins.[104]

Similarly, the Oriyā peasants and farmers still now worship their agricultural implements — which acted in times past as their rustic weapons as well — on this festive occasion. In the times of the Gaṅgas and of the Sūryavaṁśīs, peasants and farmers formed an important section of the Kaliṅgan imperial army. Though agriculture was their main occupation, they used to keep themselves prepared by regular training in war techniques under the supervision of district military commanders. This type of training was performed in special village gymnasia for the youth called *akhāḍās*, serving as the arenas for physical exercises and fights. As it is stated in some later medieval texts, the Oriyās were credited by their Dravidian neighbours with great physical strength and were said to be capable of displaying wonderful physical skill. This historically documented sportsmanship tradition was maintained in the country even after the loss of independence owing to the Muslim invasions of the sixteenth century AD. Still nowadays, on the day of *Daśaharā*, great shows of martial arts and sporting competitions are held in the village *akhāḍās* of Orissa. Demonstrations based on the display of traditional Orissan gymnastics, sword-fighting, stylised battle dances and acrobatic stunts are arranged there by various village groups on competitive basis.[105] In the neighbouring State of Andhra Pradesh, the coastal belt of which was included for centuries in the Kaliṅgan empire, a similar tradition still survives in the bloody fights performed at *Daśaharā* by a special caste of boxers called *jettis*.[106]

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[102] E. Padhi, 'Festivals Connected with Goddess Virajā of Jajpur in the Religio-Historical Perspective', unpublished manuscript, pp. 5 and 11.

[103] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

[104] H.C. Das, 'Iconography of Śākta Divinities', unpublished manuscript.

The Oriyā workers in general polish and thereafter worship their instruments of profession on this festive day, probably because the Goddess' blessing on military activities is understood to extend to all of the working activities. Thus, the swords and shields of the *khaṇḍāyats* as well as the tools of the goldsmith and blacksmith are venerated as sacred objects on the day of *Daśaharā*.[107] Indeed, either weapons and working implements can be regarded as seats of some divine power, of some *śakti*. This seems to be the purport of the association of the worship of articles of daily use with Śakti-worship on the occasion of *Daśaharā*, a most auspicious day for the Hindus of all caste.

Other important Śākta festivals of Orissa

Besides the two above-discussed cycles of Śākta festivals, the one of Caitra and the one of Āśvina-Kārttika, Orissa has a great variety of fasts and festivals dedicated to Tāntric and non-Tāntric female deities as well as a large number of local festivals dedicated to single *grāma-devatās* (village goddesses) or Ṭhākurāṇīs (plague-goddesses of the regional fame). Of course, it is impossible here to give a description of this last class of festivals, being them as numerous as the towns and hamlets of Orissa.

The most important Orissan national festivals among those propitiating non-Tāntric goddesses are the end-of-winter and spring-welcoming *Sarasvatī-Pūjā* (also known as *Śrī*

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[105] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-2; D.N. Patnaik, 'Dance Tradition of Orissa', p. 315.

[106] P. Filippani-Ronconi, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

[107] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

Pañcamī or *Vasanta Pañcamī*), dedicated to the worship of the goddess of learning, Sarasvatī, and the entire cycle of agricultural festivals dedicated to the worship of the goddess of abundance, wealth and prosperity, Lakṣmī (*Akṣaya Tṛtīyā, Nūakhiā, Kaumudī Pūrṇimā, Gaja-Lakṣmī-Pūjā* and, above all, the winter *Lakṣmī-Pūjā*, which is observed with great austerity and devotion by the Oriyā housewives). Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī, the self-standing female deities acting as the cult heroines on the occasion of these religious functions, can be regarded as manifestations of the Mother Goddess worshipped by the Śāktas even though their annual worship does not present Tāntric features.

The present section deals with some of the important fasts, vows and festivals, intrinsically Śākta in their origin and character, being observed by the entire Oriyā nation, or by conspicuous sections of the population of Orissa, in periods of the year other than the months of Caitra, Āśvina and Kārttika. These socio-religious festivities are discussed in a cyclic order in the following manner:

(a) *Vāselī-Pūjā*

(b) The marriage festival of Śiva and Pārvatī

(c) *Sāvitrī Vrata*

(d) *Raja Saṁkrānti*

(e) *Jāgulei Pañcamī*

(f) *Khudurukuṇī Oṣa*

(g) Seasonal festivals dedicated to Ṣaṣṭhī Devī

(h) *Lakṣmī-Pūjā*

(i) *Sarasvatī-Pūjā*

VĀSELĪ-PŪJĀ

This far-famed communal form of Śakti-worship is observed by the people belonging to the *kaivarta* (fishermen) caste of coastal Orissa from the full moon day marking the end of the month of Caitra (March-April) to the eighth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Vaiśākha (April-May) in honour of the tutelary deity of the caste, the horse-headed goddess Vāselī or Vāśulī,[108] whose name can be tentatively translated as She-of-Recovery or She-of-Realisation. This name indicates the great goddess' redeeming power, both in the spiritual field and in the matter of epidemics. Vāselī can be, thus, assimilated on one hand to the Śākta-Tāntric goddess Bhairavī,[109] the *śakti* of Śiva associated with the latter's aspect as the all-pervading ruler of knowledge and death (Dakṣiṇāmūrti) and, on the other, with such goddesses as the *grāma-devatā*s and Śītalā, who are believed to bestow on their worshippers recovery from various diseases. As an evidence of this, a cult image of Śītalā lying within the compound of Būḍhī Ṭhākurāṇī temple at Berhampur — a town located in the coastal tract of Ganjam district and, therefore, inhabited by many fishermen — represents this goddess as horse-headed just as the tutelary deity of the *kaivarta*s, Vāselī.

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[108] H.C. Das, '*Tradition of Folk Music and Dance in Orissa*', pp. 336-7. Vāśulī is also a popular name for the Śakti in Bengal, meant in particular to designate a form of Pārvatī (G.S. Ghurye, *op. cit.*, p. 258).

It is believed that *Vāselī-Pūjā* originated in the tenth-eleventh centuries AD under the all-pervading influence of Tantrism. Goddess Vāselī is but one of the many folk deities of Orissa whose cults were patronised in that period by the sovereigns and the upper classes of the Kaliṅgan kingdom.[110] During her annual festival, celebrated with great profusion of music, singing and dancing, a dummy-horse whose body is formed by bamboo sticks covered with clothes, and whose massive head, made of solid wood, is beautifully decorated and garlanded with red hibiscus flowers (sacred to the Devī), is the central cult object through which the spirit of Vāselī is evoked. The festival is accordingly known as *Caitighoṛānāṭa* (horse dance in the month of Caitra). A man or two conceal themselves inside a cavity contained within the dummy-horse frame and dance with vigour to the loud and hypnotic sound of drums while displaying different movements of a horse. They are accompanied by a couple of singer-dancers, one male and one female. Sometimes the dancers get possessed by the goddess and fall in trance, being then immediately replaced by other dancers. At the end of the festival the horse-head is ceremoniously taken out of its frame and brought back to the temple to which it belongs to be utilised again next year.[111]

The tradition of the dummy-horse dance — now no longer confined to the sole *kaivarta*s since other communities of Orissa have adopted it in their respective Śakti-worship patterns — is considered to be the oldest in Puri, where munificent land grants were issued by the Bhoi kings for the regular ceremonial worship of Vāselī in this form. The cult of Vāselī had once a great ascendant on the *rājā*s of Puri: in fact, there is a street in this town which is still named after her, possibly because a temple of Vāselī once stood there (even though at present there is no more trace of it). Now the shrine of Vāselī in Puri is just a poor thatched house located in one of the narrowest streets of the town. This notwithstanding, the local *kaivarta*s still revere this deity as much as in the past.[112]

The Oriyā mythical accounts about the origin of goddess Vāselī point to her association with Viṣṇu rather than with Śiva. The *Kaivarta-gupta-gītā* of the mystic poet and disciple of Śrī Caitanya, Acyutānanda Dāsa — a work of the sixteenth century AD which is considered by the *kaivarta*s of Orissa as their most sacred text — states that this goddess was born from the carcass of the divine horse donated by Viṣṇu to the founder of the *kaivarta* caste in order that the latter might utilise it as his conveyance for trade. This Viṣṇu did while resting on the Cosmic Ocean after the *pralaya*. It is very interesting to notice how, in this communal myth, the horse is created with a piece of the large banyan leaf upon which the god was sleeping.[113] This banyan leaf is likely to be nothing but a mere poetical substitute for Śeṣa, the Serpent Remainder of Purāṇic cosmologies, upon which Viṣṇu falls asleep after the *pralaya*. Thus, this later medieval tradition about the origin of goddess Vāselī indicates two things, viz., that she was conceived at that time as a Vaiṣṇavī Śakti (or, at any rate, as an emanation of Viṣṇu), and that she had some relation with the serpent Śeṣa, the one that rests upon the waters of the deluge.

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[109] D.N. Patnaik, *art. cit.*, p. 317. The cult icons of Vāselī worshipped in temples normally wear a blood-red cloth like the Bhairavī ones.

[110] Id., *Festivals of Orissa*, p. 23.

[111] *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

[112] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

The Vedic and post-Vedic mythic traditions know several divinities associated with horse. Varuṇa, regarded as the lord of cosmic waters (*āpaḥ*) long before this role was attributed to Viṣṇu, has the horse as his favourite sacrificial animal, which circumstance appears quite interesting when put in relation with the old belief of the *kaivarta*s of Orissa in the birth of the horse-goddess Vāselī from the waters of deluge. It is also well known that the sacrifice of the horse (*aśvamedha*) was a major fertility rite among the Vedic Āryans, who identified the generative power of Varuṇa with that of the sacrificed stallion.[114] The beneficent and auspicious divinities called the Aśvins (Horse-Owners), described in Vedic texts as the twin sons of a she-horse, are, on the contrary, associated with the sun: in their horse-headed form, indeed, they are said to drive the chariot of Sūrya, the sun god.[115] A post-Vedic mythical being having a horse-head, Hayagrīva, although he is described in some Purāṇas as a demon, was ultimately recognised as a minor *avatāra* of Viṣṇu representing an aspect of the sun (as in the case of the Aśvins).[116] In this connection, it is worth noticing that goddess Durgā is worshipped as Hayagrīvā (the Horse-Necked) in certain regions of eastern India next to the Himālaya Range.[117] Finally, the figure of Vāselī, the horse-headed caste-goddess of the Oriyā *kaivartas* having risen from the Ocean, might have some connection with the Submarine Mare (Vaḍavā) of Śaiva mythology, personifying the all-burning rage of Śiva immersed in the cosmic waters. In correspondence with her head, immersed in the South Ocean, the Purāṇa authors placed the entrance to the infernal regions (*pātāla*), coinciding with the

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[113] *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7.

[114] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

[115] *Ibid.*, pp. 41 ff.

[116] *Ibid.*, p. 162.

[117] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

Cosmic South (the region of death). From the mouth of this mythical she-horse issues the Submarine Fire, which is stated to be fed by the *asuras*.[118]

But the Goddess, particularly in eastern and central India, is connected with horse symbolism in still another way. Rough votive figures of a horse made of stone, clay or metal (*mātāghoṛās*) are deposited in hundreds in the popular Devī shrines of Bengal and Orissa, lying either under a sacred tree in the jungle or in towns and villages (*Pl.* XXVIII). This usage is spread as far as the Vindhya and Satpura regions, where the tribal Bhils use to place similar clay models of a horse near the stones representing their deities. These *ex-voto* figures of a horse are usually small works of folk art. In certain areas, such as in the district of Keonjhar (north-eastern Orissa), they become colossal in size. The Oriyā villagers believe that when the Devī is invoked for some aid, e.g., to eradicate epidemics or to counteract natural calamities, she comes to the worshipper's house riding the horse that has been dedicated to her under a sacred tree or in a shrine. The horse, thus, acts as the 'magical' carrier of the Goddess when her help is invoked.[119] In the folk Śākta traditions of eastern and central India there seems, thus, to exist a close link between the protective power of the Goddess and the apotropaic function traditionally attributed to the horse.

For all the above-listed reasons the horse-headed folk deity Vāselī, despite her being currently identified with Bhairavī, the Power of Death, or else with Śītalā, the goddess of epidemics, can be numbered among the benign manifestations of Śakti propitiated by the low-caste people of Orissa during the spring festivals held in the month of Caitra. Indeed, the auspicious qualities attributed to votive clay horses by uncultured people testifiy to that.

THE MARRIAGE FESTIVAL OF ŚIVA AND PĀRVATĪ

The marriage festival of Śiva and Pārvatī — a syncretistic, Śaiva-Śākta one — is annually celebrated all over India in the month of Jyeṣṭha (May-June). In Orissa this festival is held on the sixth day of the bright fortnight of this month, which is known as *Śītala Ṣaṣṭhī*, that is, 'the *ṣaṣṭhī* (sixth day of a lunar fortnight) of coolness'. This name is derived from a tradition according to which Pārvatī cooled down on this day the rage of Śiva by uniting in marriage with him.[120] Śiva is believed to have become extremely furious after *Jāgara Amāvasyā*, the 'new moon of wakefulness', during which, according to some of the Purāṇas, he swallowed and kept in his own throat the deadly *halāhala* (or *kālakūṭa*) poison having emerged from the churning of the ocean and representing the death-wish that is latent in all creatures. This the god did in order to save all living beings from certain death, thus, obtaining the epithet of Nīlakaṇṭha (the Blue-throated).[121] Not knowing that the poison would not cause any harm to Śiva, for he is the never-decaying lord of *yoga*, all the gods kept vigil all night, going on praying for his life. The prayer which is supposed to have been offered Śiva by the gods on that night according to this myth is ritually repeated during the *Śivarātri* vigil, observed in the major Śaiva sanctuaries of India in February-March by crowds of fasting pilgrims.

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[118] W.D. O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-9; S. Kramrisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 418-9.

[119] C.L. Fabri, *History of the Art of Orissa*, Bombay (etc.), 1974, pp. 12 and 185; H.C. Das, 'Heritage of Orissa', p. 13.

[120] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Yet another Purāṇic tradition traces back the rituals performed at *Śivarātri* to the devotion of the Mahādevī, who is said to have offered prayer to Śiva on that night to restore light to the world, at that time covered by the darkness of *pralaya*.[122] But this mythological link with the figure of the goddess is not found in the liturgy of the *Śivarātri* festival as it is presently observed at the Liṅgarāja temple, the greatest Śaiva sanctuary of Orissa. Here, due to the influence of Vaiṣṇavism starting from the Gaṅga period, the festival is, on the contrary, celebrated in the form of *Hari-Hara Bheṇṭa*, i.e., Śiva's meeting with Viṣṇu.

If *Śivarātri* is the most important Śaiva festival of Orissa, the marriage festival of Śiva and Pārvatī, having a mythological connection with the former as just stated, is certainly the second in order of importance. This religious festival well represents the perennial tension between the ascetic ideal embodied by the 'furious' Śiva and the householder ideal embodied by the 'cooling' Pārvatī. As enunciated by D. Kinsley

> Pārvatī, for the most part, represents the householder. Her mission in almost all renditions of the myth is to lure Śiva into the world of marriage, sex, and children, to tempt him away from asceticism, yoga, and other-worldly preoccupations. In this role Pārvatī is cast as a figure who upholds the order of *dharma*, who enhances life in the world, who represents the beauty and attraction of worldly, sexual life, who cherishes the house and society rather than the forest, the mountains, or the ascetic life. In this role she repeats the feat of Satī in luring Śiva into an erotic relationship, which this time eventually brings him within the sacrificial, priestly order permanently. Pārvatī civilizes Śiva with her presence; indeed, she domesticates him. . . . The tension between Pārvatī and Śiva as representatives of the main types of religiosity in Hinduism is stated in various ways in the myths. Śiva is always said to have no family, no lineage, and no interest in progeny, which is one of the central concerns of the order of *dharma* and the householder's religion. Pārvatī, on the contrary, is born into an established family and longs for marriage, children and a home. Śiva is associated with fire, which dries up or burns up the juices of life. . . . Pārvatī is associated with Soma, the deity or substance associated with the life essence of all plants. In many myths it is she who asks Śiva to revive Kāma, as she realises that the god of sexual desire is at

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[121] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. Veda e antico Induismo*, p. 333.

[122] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

> the root of the householder's life. In relation to Kāma, then, Śiva is a destructive fire, whereas Pārvatī is a refreshing, liquid glance . . . Śiva is often said to wear on his body the ashes of the burnt Kāma. Kāma is resuscitated when Śiva embraces Pārvatī and the sweat from her body mingles with the ashes of the burnt god. Elsewhere it is said that when Kāma was burned by Śiva he entered the limbs of Pārvatī. In the most general terms, Śiva as Agni is the fire that destroys the world at the end of each cosmic age. Pārvatī as Soma, in contrast, is the cosmic waters from which the world is inevitably reborn.[123]

The celebration of the marriage festival of Śiva and Pārvatī is believed to have started in Orissa as early as the triumph of Śaivism and Śāktism over Buddhism in the post-Gupta period. This can be argued on the basis of the depiction of the scene of Śiva's marriage with Pārvatī on the walls of the extant Śaiva temples erected by the Śailodbhava kings at Bhubaneswar, namely, the Bhārateśvara, Paraśurāmeśvara and Svarṇajāleśvara (all dating from the sixth-seventh centuries AD). This iconographic theme, usually termed as Kalyāṇasundara or Vaivāhikamūrti, was popular in many other areas of India. The finest examples of it are found at Elephanta and Ellora in Maharashtra.[124]

The *Śītala Ṣaṣṭhī* festival is observed by most of the brāhmaṇa communities of Orissa, but it reaches its climax in the cities of Bhubaneswar, Puri and Sambalpur. The basic feature of the festival is the split of the local elderly brāhmaṇa classes into two parties, one acting as the parents of the bride (Pārvatī), the other as the parents of the bride-groom (Śiva). All of the formalities, rites, processions and feasts taking usually place on the occasion of a brāhmaṇa marriage are observed during the festival, whose imitative character, as discussed above, appears to be aimed at emphasising the reconcilement, in the community life, between the ascetic ideal embodied by Śiva and the household ideal embodied by Pārvatī. On the fifth night of the festival, the processional images of the god and goddess are taken out in procession on palanquins and subsequently united in marriage with the prescribed Vedic rites. In full imitation of a real brāhmaṇa marriage, a representative image of Viṣṇu acts as the arranging mediator of the ceremony,[125] yet at Bhubaneswar the same role is peculiarly played by the representative image of Kapileśvara, traditionally regarded by local people as the 'Chief Minister' of Lord Liṅgarāja.

SĀVITRĪ VRATA

The dhārmic ideal of family life, which appears to be an essential component of *Śītala Ṣaṣṭhī* festival, is again found in *Sāvitrī Vrata*, a Śākta-Vaiṣṇava vow significantly observed by the

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[123] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-7.

[124] J.N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd edn., Calcutta, 1956, p. 485.

[125] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-1.

Oriyā married women one week before that festival. This special vow for the female, involving severe fast, is carried out on *Jyeṣṭha Amāvasyā* (the new moon day in the month of May-June) and is intended for the longevity and welfare of husbands.[126] The vow is pivoted upon the propitiation of the mythical princess Sāvitrī, whose episodes are narrated in the *Mahābhārata* and in some of the Purāṇas.

Sāvitrī, conceived on this occasion as a demi-goddess, was the beautiful and devoted wife of Satyavān, an exiled prince. She went and lived in the forest with her husband although she knew that he would die young, as forecast by the seer Nārada. When the fixed day for Satyavān's death came, the handsome prince expired on his wife's lap. When Yama, the divinity of death, appeared to take Satyavān's soul away, Sāvitrī, using a stratagem, succeeded in making the god revive her beloved husband and, furthermore, got as a boon a hundred sons from Satyavān as well as the latter's restoration to the throne.[127] This legend, very much dear to all Hindus, has profound symbolism, enunciated in recent times in the noble work by Śrī Aurobindo entitled *Sāvitrī*.

The morale underlying this *vrata* is that the imitation of Sāvitrī can teach a married lady how to build a happy and prosperous family. Through the worship of Sāvitrī, the husband himself is being worshipped. The model of a perfect wife set-up here as an example combines spiritual and sexual love with the care of husband, including his family members and his patrimony, and the longing for many sons with the strenuous attachment to husband even in misery, starvation and death. The other model, represented by Pārvatī especially on the occasion of the festival in which her marriage with Śiva is celebrated, does not seem to be very distant from this. In both cases, a typically feminine *śakti* is evoked and propitiated, namely, woman's innate power to civilise, improve, give sense to man's life through marriage, love and child-bearing. This is an universal feature of the eternal feminine, not only of the Hindu conception of the same. Sāvitrī is the perfect symbol of the feminine will emitting an irresistible force that is the equivalent of the *tapas* (the heat produced through the practice of *yoga*) of the male ascetics. Even the gods must yield to this force, against which the Death itself (Yama of Sāvitrī's legend) is powerless.[128]

Woman's role can have shaped this way only in a pre-patriarchal society. In this connection, it is interesting to notice that *Sāvitrī Vrata* is believed by some to be the Brāhmaṇical adaptation of a primitive gathering festival observed by the tribal womenfolk to ensure prosperity to their husbands and children.[129] Yet an articulate discussion about this matter would require a deeper knowledge of the socio-economic background of female-oriented cults in the pre-Vedic society, which is unfortunately still beyond the scope of ethno-historical researches.

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[126] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 187.

[127] J. Dowson, *op. cit.*, p. 291; D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-3.

[128] P. Filippani-Ronconi, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

[129] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 189.

RAJA SAṀKRĀNTI

The Orissan Śākta festival known as *Raja Saṁkrānti*, namely, 'the *Saṁkrānti* of menses', is the most representative form of earth-worship and the most popular festivity among those celebrating the sacredness of the female principle. The festival, which starts from the first day in the Hindu month of Āṣāḍha (June-July), taken by tradition as the conventional day of beginning of the monsoon season, is also meant as an occasion for dancing, feasting and sporting for three days. In the Indian astrological tradition this *Saṁkrānti* (the day in which the sun enters a new zodiacal house) is termed as *Mithuna Saṁkrānti* (from Mithuna, i.e., the Twins or Gemini constellation). The festival, furthermore, marks the beginning of the annual agricultural operations following the moistening of the soil — previously parched by the scorching summer heat — after the first showers of the monsoon. Though it is clear that *Raja Saṁkrānti* is in the first place an agricultural festival of the fertile coastal plains of Orissa, yet this is observed by the Hindu peasants all over the State as the most important ceremonial occasion for the invocation of rains (accompanied by earth-worship).

The biological symbolism evoked by the Sanskrit term *raja* (meaning menses or menstrual discharge) is openly referred to the earth-goddess, who is popularly said to be menstruated during the three days of the festival, at which time she is believed to get prepared for the next crop. Indeed, there is an archaic pan-Indian belief that the first seasonal rains inaugurate the fertile period of the earth exactly as woman's menses inaugurate her fertile cycle, the period in which she is ready to get pregnant. Such a naturalistic analogy causes all agricultural operations to be suspended during the festival: in fact, a Hindu woman — we should keep in mind that the earth-goddess, on this occasion, is conceived as such — is considered impure during her menstrual period, for which reason she is traditionally not permitted to leave her home or even touch anything and is given full rest as soon as menses appear. Peculiarly enough in this connection, the *Raja Saṁkrānti* festival is observed by a large number of Oriyā unmarried girls (the potential receptacles of human fertility) with all the restrictions prescribed for a menstruated woman, even though the great majority of these girls is not menstruated at all in those days. Young girls are, thus, assimilated to the earth goddess during this three-day festival.[130]

The *Raja* festival of Orissa is the regional variant of the seasonal religious observance known as *Ambuvācī* in other parts of India. Also on the occasion of this national one-day festival, usually celebrated on the fourth day of Āṣāḍha, the earth is considered to be impure, agricultural activities being consequently inhibited.[131] The pan-Indian festival of *Ambuvācī*, involving the suspension of agricultural works, is possibly reminiscent of an ancient one-month suspension of any ritual indicating the year's menstrual taboo. In the period of the year marking the advent of rains, in fact, the earth-goddess was anciently believed to menstruate in conformity with archaic matriarchal beliefs that, during the Neolithic period, were probably widespread over the whole Indo-Mediterranean area of civilization. This suspension for one month of all religious ceremonies is stated to have been observed in ancient times at several goddess-sanctuaries in West Asia and in the Greek world.[132] The most eminent Śākta shrine of India at which this tradition has been integrally preserved is the one of goddess Kāmākhyā in Assam. Here, in the period of the summer season preceding the celebration of the *Ambuvācī* festival, the natural cleft in the rock forming a part of the inner chamber of the temple, venerated as the *yoni* of the great goddess, starts oozing a red liquid due to the presence of iron oxide in the rock itself, soaked in the water of the first showers of the monsoon; this red liquid substance is regarded as the menstrual discharge (*raja* or *ṛtu*) of the Devī, and as such is ceremonially drunk by the Śākta devotees who gather at the shrine of Kāmākhyā on that occasion.[133]

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[130] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 104; D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Another of the possible archetypes of the festival of *Ambuvācī* as well as of the *Raja* festival of Orissa might be represented by the Vedic fertility rites performed in honour of the god Varuṇa at the beginning of the monsoon season, forming as a whole the *Varuṇapraghāsa* (eating of Varuṇa) ceremony. This was one of the *cāturmāsya* festivities, three in total, each of which marked the beginning of one of the three seasons of the Vedic year. The private household sacrifices performed on the occasion of the *Varuṇapraghāsa* ceremony were aimed at causing the first monsoon rains to fall by the grace of the Vedic god Varuṇa. The principal oblations consisted of a ram and a sheep made of barley dough, which were adorned with sexual symbols so as to express an idea of fecundity. The sacrificer's wife had to talk about sexual matters — a well-known substitute for actual sexual performance that was considered since very early times to be as effective as the latter in terms of fertility magic. At the end of this rite the sacrificer and his wife stepped down to a water course or tank and washed shoulders to each other.[134]

It is true that the fertility symbolism of the *Varuṇapraghāsa* ceremony has little in common with the female-dominated biological symbolism characterising the *Ambuvācī* and *Raja* festivals; this notwithstanding, this Vedic ritualistic observance constitutes one of the earliest examples of the generalised sexual symbolism that, in India, has been always associated with the seasonal ceremonies for the propitiation of the rain-giving deities or spirits. In the case under discussion, Varuṇa, regarded by some scholars as the lord of the *āsurik* gods associated since the Vedic period with fertility magic, erotic rites, agricultural festivals, Nāga and Yakṣa cults,[135] might have embodied the sacred aqueous principle that, later on in Sanskrit literature, we find associated with the figure of Mother Earth (both as Lakṣmī and Pārvatī).

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[131] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[132] B. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, I, p. 166.

[133] A. Mookerjee, *Kali. La dea della forza femminile*, Como, 1990, p. 33.

[134] J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, pp. 125 and 201-2.

Some Orissan scholars suggest that the most direct regional archetype of the *Raja* festival could be the so-called *Āṣāḍhī-Pūjā*, on the occasion of which some of the indigenous tribes of Orissa (the Juang, the Kondh, the Bondo and the Santal) bath a simulacrum of the earth-goddess with the holy water symbolising the power of the rain god (may the latter figure be paralleled to that of the Vedic Varuṇa?). This anticipatory rite of imitative-sympathetic magic was adopted in course of time by the Oriyā Śāktas at some of their holiest sanctuaries: at Bāliharacaṇḍī temple near Puri, for instance, the worshipped image of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā is ceremonially bathed by the priests on the *Raja Saṁkrānti* day.[136] Great *yātrā*s are celebrated on the same day also at the shrines of Baruṇei near Khurda (Baruṇei means She-of-Waters), of Ugratārā at Bushandapur, of Tārā-Tāriṇī in the district of Ganjam, of Maṇināga Devī at Ranpur, of Tāriṇī at Ghatgaon and at many other Śākta shrines of Orissa.

Under many aspects, in Orissa the traditional bathing festival of Āṣāḍha has become a Śākta religious ceremony on the occasion of which the great Goddess — in this case symbolising the earth itself — is got to take a sacred bath that is believed to stimulate the fertility power contained in the earth. The Devī is, thus, worshipped as Mother Earth during this annual rite of invocation of rains, on the eve of which she is believed to menstruate. On the total analogy of woman's physiology, this makes her symbolically ready to enter her fertile period, coinciding with the monsoon season (inaugurated by *Raja Saṁkrānti*). Raindrops are the liquid 'seeds' that fecundate the earth, as it is suggested in some Śaivite texts by comparing the sky to an immense phallus (*ākāśaliṅga*) resting on the earth, which is the female organ itself (*yoni*), the matrix of the world.[137] On the other hand, also the *Manu-smṛti* (IX.33) states that the female can be considered as the field, and the male, as the dispenser of seeds.[138]

The period in which the full Sanskritisation of the *Ambuvācī* festival (the *Raja* of Orissa) was achieved cannot be determined; however, as far as Orissa is concerned, this festival is already mentioned in some *Smṛti-śāstra*s dating from the eleventh century AD. Nowadays, the Oriyā national synthesis of all the above-mentioned tribal and Hindu bathing festivals is the *Snāna-Yātrā* of Puri Jagannātha, celebrated more or less on the same dates of the *Raja Saṁkrānti* festival. On that occasion, the wooden idols representing Jagannātha, Balabhadra and Subhadrā are ritually bathed with one hundred-eight pots of water while their sight remains precluded to the devotees. The images of the deities are taboo in those days, just as the earth and women are taboo during the *Raja* festival. Three sacred paintings representing the members of the Puri Trinity are hung for the exigencies of daily worship over a bamboo partition wall raised between the idols and the people. Such paintings depict the Puri Trinity in its most anthropomorphised and Sanskritised form wherein Nārāyaṇa stands for Śrī Jagannātha, the serpent-god Ananta for Balabhadra and goddess Bhuvaneśvarī for Subhadrā.[139] Both Nārāyaṇa and Ananta are associated with cosmic waters while Bhuvaneśvarī, the Lady-of-the-Spheres, was conceived in the Tantra tradition as the transcendental form of nature (*prakṛti*). The representative pictures worshipped in the sanctum of the main temple of Puri during the *Snāna-Yātrā* may, therefore, be meant to suggest a water-plus-earth symbolism analogous to that of the *Raja* festival. Such a parallelism of symbols and rituals is likely to have developed as a consequence of the later medieval interplay of Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism in Orissa.

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[135] A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Washington, 1928, II, pp. 26-7.

[136] R.N. Dash, 'Folk Festivals of Orissa — A Study', p. 73.

[137] A. Daniélou, *Śiva e Dioniso*, p. 60.

[138] M. Eliade, *Trattato di storia delle religioni*, Torino, 1954, p. 268.

JĀGULEI PAÑCAMĪ

Jāgulei Pañcamī, otherwise known as *Manasā Pañcamī*, is an apotropaic festival observed in some Orissan villages on the fifth day of the dark fortnight of Śrāvaṇa (July-August) to honour and, at the same time, ward off snakes. The month of Śrāvaṇa, marking the culmination of the monsoon season, presents particular risks regarding the possibility of being bitten by poisonous snakes, since the latter, in this very period of the year, are forced to come out of their subterranean lairs, flooded with water because of heavy rains. Propitiation of snakes during this month is, therefore, a very judicious choice in an Indian villager's logic.

The practice is very primitive, and has also some Vedic association, which was most likely the result of the culture contact of the Āryans with the previous settlers of the Indian sub-continent. For instance, the seasonal festival called *Nāga Pañcamī*, celebrated both in Bengal and in the coastal district of Baleswar in Orissa during the month of Śrāvaṇa to propitiate the serpent-goddess Manasā and her associates the Aṣṭanāgas (the eight mythical serpent kings), appears to be the popular counterpart of the ancient *Sarpabali*, an annual rite of serpent-worship performed during the monsoon season, which finds mention in the *Gṛhya-sūtras* (the rules, connected with the Veda, for the conduct of domestic rites).[140] In Orissa, the same folk festival, known as *Jāgulei Pañcamī* or else as *Manasā Pañcamī*, is now allied with the Śaiva creed,[141] which fact appears logical in view of the ancient linkage of

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[139] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, pp. 73-4; D. N. Pathy, *art. cit.*, p. 227.

[140] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-6.

[141] R.N. Dash, 'Fasts and Festivals of Orissa', pp. 193-4.

Manasā cult to Śaivism. In a Vaiṣṇava variant of the same form of worship in vogue among both the brāhmaṇa communities and the royal families of the State, a snake made of earth is worshipped as Baladeva, the anthropomorphic manifestation of the cosmic serpent Ananta.[142] The worship of Ananta (or Baladeva) seems to have developed in Orissa starting from the cult picture of Maṇināga, an indigenous serpent deity associated with the sacred primordial waters as well as with the earth-goddess.[143]

In spite of its being presently mingled with the worship of Śiva, the *Jāgulei Pañcamī* festival appears to have been originally instituted for the propitiation of an independent, purely Śākta serpent-goddess, Jāgulei, whose name is in all evidence a corruption of that of Jāṅgulī, the Buddhist counterpart of the Brāhmaṇical goddess Manasā. It has, thus, been inferred that this festival might be a Hindu superimposition over an earlier Tāntric Buddhist *vrata* (vow).[144] Jāṅgulī, whose name, deriving from the Sanskrit term *jaṅgal* (jungle), means She-of-Poison or also Knowledge-of-Poison (cf. the male form *jāṅguli*, meaning a snake-charmer),[145] was conceived by the Tāntric Buddhist adepts as an emanation of Akṣobhya, the second Dhyānī Buddha. Like the Jaina goddess Padmāvatī and the Hindu Manasā, she was the female divinity curing snake-bite and also preventing it. She can be regarded as a form of Tārā, for one of the eight kinds of fear that were said to be dispelled by the latter goddess was the fear of snakes. Most likely, all of these serpent-goddesses belonging to different faiths had a non-Āryan origin, whereas their absorption into the mainstream of Indian religions was the work of medieval Tantrism.[146]

Traces of an ancient serpent-goddess cult are noticed in the religions of the Kondhs and Oraons, two Dravidian-speaking tribal peoples of Orissa. Some of the tribes of the State worship Manasā along with her 'seven sisters', which fact results of great interest when connected with the Hindu cult of Saptamātṛkās or with the Dravidian folk cult of the Seven Sisters, the dispensers of all diseases.[147] A number of tribal myths of Orissa trace the origin of snakes to the hair, intestines, umbilical cord or necklace of a woman or girl,[148] with this evincing their deep rootedness in female-oriented tribal cults. Stone images depicting a serpent-goddesses having a canopy of snake hoods above her head are worshipped as *grāma-*

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[142] B. Mishra, 'Maṇināga Worship in Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. II, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 42.

[143] K.C. Mishra, *The Cult of Jagannātha*, 2nd rev. edn., Calcutta, 1984, pp. 14-5; S.S. Rajaguru, 'The Olasingh Plate of Banuvardhana', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. II, No. 1, p. 45.

[144] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 186.

[145] M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, new edn., Oxford, 1988, p. 417.

[146] A.K. Bhattacharya, 'Tārā as a Serpent Deity and Its Jain Counterpart Padmāvatī', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 156-9.

[147] S.C. Panda, *Nāga Cult in Orissa*, Delhi, 1986, pp. 106-7.

[148] V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, pp. 293-302.

devatās in many villages of Orissa; in some cases, an image of this type is worshipped at the same time by the Hindu folk and by their tribal neighbours, either community recognising in it the image of its own serpent-goddess (*nāgamātā*).

Thus, the tradition of serpent-goddess worship — now epitomised in the Śākta folk festival known as *Jāgulei Pañcamī* — has an ancient and uninterrupted history in Orissa, which seems to present no solution of continuity with the pre-Vedic forms of ophiolatry.

In most serpent festivals of India the person acting as the chief celebrant is a low-caste villager or, much more rarely, a brāhmaṇa.[149] This is also the case with the Jāgulei festival of Orissa, on the occasion of which the celebrant is usually the barber of the village. He models with mud a three-eyed image of the goddess provided with a canopy of serpent hoods over the head, places it in a basket and, with a torch in hand, moves from door to door through the village, offering its inhabitants cakes specially prepared for this recurrence. The latter rite is believed to constitute a precautionary measure against snake-bite: in fact, as the cakes offered by the barber symbolise the blessing of goddess Jāgulei, they are believed to protect those who eat them from the lethal effects of snake-bite.[150]

KHUDURUKUṆĪ OṢA

This is a fast observed on each Sunday in the month of Bhādrapada (August-September) especially by the unmarried girls belonging to the caste of traders (*sādhavas*). The fast is dedicated to both Durgā and Maṅgalā, united in one divine person so as to form a composite female deity known as Khudurukuṇī. This name of the Goddess means 'she who is very eager for *khuda*', for fried *khuda* (the left out particles of new rice) is customarily offered to the Devī on this festive occasion. After having a purificatory bath, the virgins of the village build tiny shrines of earth or sand on the bank of a river or pond, decorate them with seasonal flowers and finally present before them their offerings to goddess Khudurukuṇī, represented by a mud fetish modelled by them themselves.[151]

Khudurukuṇī Oṣa, which is basically a Śākta form of earth-worship, appears to be related to another form of earth-worship performed by the tribal and semi-tribal communities of Koraput district (south-western Orissa) during the celebration of the so-called *Bāli Yātrā* (festival of sand). In fact, also during the latter festival — which is significantly observed in the month of Bhādrapada, just as Khudurukuṇī Oṣa — an altar of sand (*bāli-ghara*) is erected, in this case for the worship of different kinds of cereals and not of the Devī as such. The observance of this non-Brāhmaṇical form of earth-worship is accompanied by singing, dancing, animal sacrifices, painful ordeals (similar to those performed during the month of Caitra to honour Śiva and the Devī) and shamanistic ceremonies with display of spirit-possession.[152]

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[149] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, pp. 289-90.

[150] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 104; S.C. Panda, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

[151] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 99; D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

Another ancient form of earth-worship in vogue among the Oriyās, the Śākta *vrata* (vow) called *Bāli Tṛtīyā*, appears to have a common strain with *Khudurukuṇī Oṣa*. Just as the latter, indeed, this fast is observed in the month of Bhādrapada, is practised by the female only (in this case, by the married women rather than by the unmarried girls as it is the case with *Khudurukuṇī Oṣa*), and is centred round the worship of sand-made images of deities (in this case depicting Śiva and Gaurī). The female principle has a pre-eminence over the male one on the occasion of this *pūjā* rite too as is demonstrated by the latter's alternative designation as *Gaurī Vrata*.[153]

The celebration of *Khudurukuṇī Oṣa* culminates in the evening with the girls' musical recitation of the story of Durgā killing the buffalo-demon, followed without solution of continuity by that of the popular Oriyā heroine called Tāpoi. Such ballads are recited before a mud image of the goddess installed on an earthen altar plastered with cow-dung and decorated with floral designs and garlands. Tāpoi was a legendary *sādhava* (merchant) girl who, after having fallen into disfavour with her sisters-in-law while her brothers were absent on a sea voyage for the purpose of trade, endured all sorts of suffering with courage and patience by the force of her faith in Maṅgalā (the *iṣṭa-devatā* of the girls and ladies), to whom she used to offer her only and poor food, *khuda* (whence the Oriyā epithet Khudurukuṇī, used to designate the Mahādevī on this particular ritualistic occasion). The popular legend of Tāpoi has been also adopted as a narrative motif in Orissan cloth paintings, where its episodes are depicted in small panels surrounding the figure of goddess Maṅgalā placed in the centre. This story is recited during the festival along with that of Durgā slaying Mahiṣa in order to set two moral ideals before the fasting unmarried girls. The first of them is to be courageous like the virgin goddess Durgā in fighting the evil forces for the good of the community, and the second, to be strong like the legendary heroine Tāpoi in bearing all sufferings with patience to ultimately come out successful in life.[154]

SEASONAL FESTIVALS DEDICATED TO ṢAṢṬHĪ DEVĪ

Goddess Ṣaṣṭhī is the Hindu patroness and protectress of children. Her worship is particularly developed in Bengal,[155] but it is also very popular in other States of India, Orissa included.

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[152] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

[153] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 102; R.N. Dash, '*Folk Festivals of Orissa — A Study*', p. 82; Id., 'Fasts and Festivals of Orissa', cit., pp. 184-5.

[154] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.

[155] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 384, n. 1.

The worship of Ṣaṣṭhī Devī can take place on any *śukla-ṣaṣṭhī* (sixth day in the bright fortnight of a lunar month), as is suggested by the name itself of this manifestation of the universal Śakti.[156] This peculiar ritualistic usage has been established on the analogy of the fact that Ṣaṣṭhī Devī (a name that can be rendered with the English expression 'Mother-Sixth') is considered to be the personification of the sixth day following the birth of a child, which is traditionally believed to mark the end of the danger of death for both the mother and the new-born. On that day the goddess is imagined to come and write the future of a child on his/her forehead; this prodigious and propitious intervention of the Śakti in the initial days of one's life is celebrated in some regions of India with a household ceremony called *Ṣaṣṭhījāgara*.[157]

The sixth day in the bright fortnight of the month of Bhādrapada (August-September) is looked on in Orissa as the most auspicious day for the worship of Ṣaṣṭhī Devī. On this sacred recurrence, termed *Bhādra Śukla Ṣaṣṭhī*, ritual fast is specially observed by the Oriyā women longing for progeny. Another ritual fast meant to please goddess Ṣaṣṭhī, simply termed *Ṣaṣṭhī Oṣa*, is associated with a peculiar domestic rite aimed at drawing the goddess' protection onto the new-born child soon after birth. The rite in question, which has been possibly borrowed by the Oriyā Hindus from the religious culture of the Gond tribes, consists in drawing a symbolic home for the baby's soul on one of the inner walls of the house in which the baby has been born, after which, as a prophylactic measure, a cowrie shell (*Cypraea moneta*) is fixed to the painting in an obverse or reverse position in accordance with the sex of the child.[158] The cowrie is used by the Gonds of Bastar (bordering on the westernmost districts of Orissa) and by the Juangs of Orissa as an amulet against magical dangers; the Muria and Maria Gonds also use to put a string of cowries round the neck of a baby suffering from some disease to avert evil influences from him/her.[159]

Another important Oriyā festivity dedicated to the propitiation of Ṣaṣṭhī Devī, known as *Prathamāṣṭamī* (the eighth *tithi* of the eldest child), is held in the month of Mārgaśīrṣa (December-January) for the longevity and welfare of the eldest child of a family. The invocation of the blessing of goddess Ṣaṣṭhī on the child is, in this case, associated with *kalaśa-pūjā* (adoration of the sacred pot filled with water symbolising the Goddess in her life-giving and regenerating aspect). The peculiar worship pattern adopted at *Prathamāṣṭamī*, mention of which is already found in some *Smṛti-śāstras* of Orissa dating back to the fourteenth century AD, is a further proof of the tribal origin of the cult of Ṣaṣṭhī Devī in Orissa inasmuch as *kalaśa-pūjā* is generally esteemed to be a form of worship having originated outside the pale of the Vedic religion during the early phases of the Indian Neolithic.[160]

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[156] R.N. Dash, 'Folk Festivals of Orissa — A Study', p. 76.

[157] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 100; M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

[158] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, pp. 75-6.

[159] V. Elwin, *The Tribal Art of Middle India*, London, 1951, pp. 37-9.

The last important yearly occasion for the worship of Ṣaṣṭhī Devī in Orissa is *Jyeṣṭha Śukla Ṣaṣṭhī*, that is, the sixth day in the bright fortnight of Jyeṣṭha (May-June), coinciding with the celebration of the marriage festival of Śiva and Pārvatī. On this day the Oriyā Hindus pay homage to a variant form of Ṣaṣṭhī Devī imagined to reside in the Vindhya mountains so that the festival is otherwise known as *Āraṇyakā Ṣaṣṭhī*, i.e., 'the day of the Ṣaṣṭhī belonging to the forest'.[161] This circumstance may further testify to the tribal origin of this deity, for the Vindhya Range has been ever associated by the Hindus with the fearful and blood-thirsty mountain goddess called Vindhyavāsinī, initially venerated by the non-Āryan peoples of Middle India.

It seems, thus, likely that Ṣaṣṭhī Devī, long since regarded by the Hindus as a divine being influencing children's lives positively, may have evolved from a class of child-affecting ogresses worshipped by the indigenous peoples of Middle India. In a word, this deity might have been initially attributed a character similar to that of the ancient Buddhist goddess of prosperity and progeny, Hārītī, who, as it is well known, was originally a *yakṣī* (ogress) credited with the terrible power of 'stealing' children from their mothers by affecting them with smallpox and other diseases. According to a Buddhist tradition, Hārītī was eventually converted by the Buddha himself into the divine bestower and protectress of children.[162] It is, thus, very probable that, in ancient times, Ṣaṣṭhī Devī was credited with a malignant character like the Buddhist goddess Hārītī. A number of relieves recovered from Bengal show that the cult of Hārītī was anciently widespread over that region of India,[163] which, rather significantly, is also believed to have been the cradle of the cult of Ṣaṣṭhī Devī.

Temples dedicated to goddess Ṣaṣṭhī as such are not found in Orissa, yet there is a very popular Śākta pilgrimage centre in Dhenkanal district, the city of Kosala, at which goddess Rāmacaṇḍī is ardently worshipped for her power to bestow children on barren women. It is a common sight there to see barren women crying and dancing in ecstasy while being presumedly possessed by the great goddess, whom they seek to propitiate this way in order to obtain children in return.[164] The occurrence of such mass trance phenomena at this goddess-shrine may bear some relation to the age-old shamanistic cultures of Orissa, in which woman generally played a very prominent role.

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[160] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, pp. 75-6; D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

[161] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, pp. 76-7.

[162] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 380-1; D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

[163] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

[164] N. Senapati and P.N. Tripathy, eds., *Dhenkanal District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1972, p. 436.

LAKṢMĪ-PŪJĀ

During the month of Mārgaśīrṣa (November-December) all the crops are stored in Orissan rural houses. By that time, farmers generally feel greatly satisfied with their yields after six months of hard toil in the fields. Each Thursday in that month is consecrated to the worship of goddess Lakṣmī, the deity of abundance and prosperity, who is then thanked for having grown and protected the crops in all stages of cultivation work.

The winter *Lakṣmī-Pūjā* can be considered the conclusive event of a cycle of festivities dedicated to Lakṣmī in the course of the agricultural year. These have a landmark in the *Nūakhiā* (first eating) festival, celebrated in western Orissa at the culmination of the monsoon season. The cycle of agricultural festivals dedicated to Lakṣmī starts all over Orissa from *Akṣaya Tṛtīyā*, the third day of the bright fortnight in the month of Vaiśākha (April-May). On that day the ceremony of the first sowing (especially of rice) is performed by the farmers by directly presenting their offerings to Lakṣmī in the fields. This very auspicious day, which is traditionally taken to have been the initial day of the mythical *kṛta-yuga* (Golden Age), is believed to guarantee permanence to any action carried out on it. Some Hindu religious texts state that on this very day the river Ganges descended to the earth from heaven, thus, ensuring a perennial supply of water for the exigencies of agriculture. Indeed, the Sanskrit term *akṣaya*, from which the worship under discussion draws its name, means 'perennial, undecaying'.[165]

The winter *Lakṣmī-Pūjā* is not only aimed at propitiating Lakṣmī, the divine dispenser of wealth and abundance, but also at paying homage to the accumulated crops themselves. In fact, during this festive period Lakṣmī is evoked and worshipped in every Hindu household of Orissa in the shape of a heap of paddy measures or ears of wheat (which are artistically joined together, covered with red clothes and finally decorated with garlands) rather than in the shape of a regular icon. In other words, during this festival goddess Lakṣmī is believed to manifest herself as harvested rice or wheat. When worshipped in this form, the goddess does not require the installation of an iconic representation of hers. This deification of cereals means that wealth should be always enjoyed properly and not misused, for rice and wheat, the main products of Orissan soil, are the gifts made by the goddess to the cultivators and their families in exchange for their work, devotion to the gods and observance of *dharma*. This moral teaching is summarised in the evening recitation of the *Lakṣmī Purāṇa*, composed by the sixteenth-century Oriyā poet Balarāma Dāsa, in all Oriyā households during the period of *Lakṣmī-Pūjā*. The greatness of the goddess, as well as of all what she stands for in the household religious life, is extolled in this regional Purāṇa.[166]

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[165] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[166] K.B. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 48; D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-4.

The worship pattern observed during *Lakṣmī-Pūjā*, as it is the case with the greater part of the folk festivals of Orissa, is traced back to tribal religions by a section of scholars. 'The outcome of tribal crop-goddess worship was the non-tribal *Lakṣmī-Pūjā* during early historic periods. From the community form of worship this has travelled to the household Lakṣmī worship.'[167] The temporary altar made of grains forming the central cult object on this occasion is a typical feature of the religion of the Saoras of south-western Orissa, who use to pile grains up in a mound on the house floor or in baskets at the time of sacrifice.[168] The nice designs drawn with rice powder mixed with water (*jhotis*), with which Oriyā women, using their fingers, decorate the floors and courtyards of their houses on each Thursday during *Lakṣmī-Pūjā*, are another example of the influence having been exerted by the tribal cultures of Orissa on the ritualistic pattern of this festival. These designs generally depict Lakṣmī's footprints (a visual representation of the wealth that enters the house in the form of harvested cereals), lotus flowers (Lakṣmī's main symbol) or a heap of rice drawn like a pyramid with receding dots, representing in a graphic way the central object of worship of the *pūjā*.[169] These drawings, on the whole, symbolise goodness, well-being, prosperity and auspiciousness, viz., the special *śakti*s or divine energies embodied by Lakṣmī.

Oriyā women are the leading characters of the winter Lakṣmī-worship. All the rituals prescribed for this festival are, in fact, performed by housewives, who observe them with great austerity and devotion. They also use to cook different preparations of sweets (rice cakes, *khīri*, etc.) that are first offered to the goddess and then eaten by all the members of the family. The custom of enjoying the offerings exclusively in the family context distinguishes *Lakṣmī-Pūjā* from other Śākta festivals having a more social or communal character and emphasises the role of housewives as the sustainers of the effort of feeding their families.

During the Sūryavaṁśī or Gajapati period (*ca.* AD 1435-1540) each Oriyā housewife was regarded as a human manifestation of Lakṣmī, whose cult was raised to the highest status under the influence of the national cult of Jagannātha. Married ladies, thus, started being regarded as the responsibles for the wealth and prosperity of the whole family, for the benefit of which they had to perform the daily religious rites properly, especially in so far as the worship of Lakṣmī was concerned.[170] However, it appears clear from the records of the time that the women of the Gajapati epoch were specially extolled as the bearers of male sons, of whom the armies of the Gajapatis had a great need in an epoch that witnessed continuous wars with the neighbouring Hindu and Muslim powers.[171] The glorification of woman in the imperial phase of Orissan history was, therefore, framed into a patriarchal and military logic and was not at all the consequence of an increased importance of woman in the religious sphere.

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[167] R.N. Dash, *art. cit.*, p. 72.

[168] V. Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, p. 177.

[169] D.N. Pathy, *art. cit.*, p. 213.

[170] M.P. Dash, 'Some Aspects of the Social Life under the Sūrya-Gajapati Rule (1435-1540)', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXVII, Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, pp. 94-5.

[171] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

A celebrated episode from the Oriyā *Lakṣmī-Purāṇa*, composed in the Gajapati period, bears reference to the Lakṣmī-worship observed by Oriyā low-caste women on each Thursday in the month of Mārgaśīrṣa. This works states that one of such days the goddess left her abode in the premises of Jagannātha temple at Puri and went round to visit the houses of the city, soon realising that all of them lacked the cleanliness and purity she liked. Only when she reached the poor house of a sweeping woman in the outskirts of the holy *kṣetra* she found that the rituals in her honour were properly observed; the sweeping woman, in fact, had plastered her mud hut afresh with cow-dung, drawn lotus flowers in front of her door, lit a lamp with ten wicks and offered up ten kinds of fruits and flowers (this arrangement for the worship of the goddess is the same one that is now made each Thursday during the *Lakṣmī-Pūjā*). The goddess was so delighted by the cultus rendered to her by the poor low-caste woman, that she changed the latter's miserable hut into a wonderful palace. Yet, due to her having had intercourse with a low-caste person, she was banished from the temple of Puri by her consort Jagannātha, so instructed by his elder brother Balabhadra.[172]

Leaving aside the conclusion of this episode, which is principally purposed to explain why the *mahāprasāda* (holy food) of Lord Jagannātha can be taken by people of all caste, we limit ourselves to point out that this story clearly traces the worship of Lakṣmī in the month of Mārgaśīrṣa to an archaic religious tradition observed from the remote antiquity by the low-caste women of coastal Orissa as an heritage from earlier goddess-cults (possibly of the tribal origin).

SARASVATĪ-PŪJĀ

This North Indian festival is celebrated on the fifth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Māgha (January-February) and is, therefore, also known as *Māgha Śukla Pañcamī*. Another popular designation of this festival is *Śrī Pañcamī*. This is held in honour of goddess Sarasvatī, the *śakti* of wisdom, learning, eloquence, literature, arts and science. This goddess is completely ascetic and *sāttvik* in her nature. Her pure, milky-white appearance dissociates her from fertility cultus. Although she is addressed as Mother, her motherhood is only metaphorical: she is, indeed, said to preside over all creations of human thought, among which the most sacred and important is the Veda. Sarasvatī is an evolved form of the Vedic goddess Vāc (Speech), anciently regarded as the Mother of the Vedas and the power of action proceeding from the Supreme *Brahman*. Sarasvatī is also found in various forms in the Buddhist and Jaina pantheons as the goddess of learning. Thus, with her origin in the Hindu religion, with her attributes of wisdom, knowledge and such other celestial qualities, she crept into Buddhism and Jainism maintaining the same characteristic features, of course in different names with a little change in iconography.

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[172] R.P. Mohapatra, *Temple Legends of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, 1989, pp. 39-40.

Sarasvatī's presence is sought in libraries and schools by those who create, bear and assimilate culture.[173] It is, therefore, quite logical that the annual worship of Sarasvatī is celebrated in the first place by the students, who on this day observe fast and pray the goddess to bestow on them success in learning activities.

Clay images of Sarasvatī are prepared on this ritual occasion on the basis of the prescribed *dhyāna* (iconographic features). The four-armed goddess is seated on a lotus holding in her hands a rosary, a manuscript and two lotuses. She has a crown like a dazzling moon and her complexion is like pearl, moon and *kunda* (jasmine) flowers. She has developed breasts and three eyes, smiling face, and half-moon on her forehead symbolising her association with Śiva. Sometimes she holds *vīṇā* (the Indian lute) with two of her arms and is flanked by her mount the swan.

Being the goddess of arts, culture and learning, Sarasvatī is venerated with pomp and grandeur. The clay images made for the most part in accordance with her traditional iconographic features are installed on this recurrence in schools, colleges, universities, private houses and in public places. In the last-mentioned places the images are of over-life sizes and made attractive with lights and other modern things drawing the people in large number. Such places are turned for about a week to a sort of fair with varieties of shops, music, dance performances, acrobatics and so on. Such a feature is more common in towns and cities than in rural villages.

The goddess is generally propitiated with offering of fruits, sweetmeats and flowers, preferably white (lily and jasmine above all). The boys and girls frequenting educational institutions observe strict fast till the *puṣpāñjali* (offering of flowers to the deity), which is made amidst muttering of specific *mantra*s by the priest and followed in chorus by the participants. The students on this occasion place their books, pens, pencils, etc., in a pavilion prepared by the side of the goddess with an intention of gaining her favour or grace. The images are generally taken in procession next day to the nearby tanks or rivers for immersion. But exception is marked in the *sārvajanīna* (public) *pūjā*, where the images are immersed after eight or ten days from the date of their installation.

Sarasvatī-Pūjā is, among other things, also a spring-welcoming festival, being celebrated at the time of the first signals announcing the advent of the spring season (between January and February). Accordingly, one of the subsidiary names of this holy function is *Vasanta Pañcamī* (*vasanta* for spring).[174] The new-blossomed flowers offered to the goddess during this *pūjā* put into evidence the latter's season-opening character, while the epithet *śrī*, designating the lustre that is conferred by Sarasvatī on her worshippers on the occasion of the celebration of this festival, also appears referred to the auspicious qualities associated with the spring season: general well-being, good physical health, material prosperity, bodily beauty and ruling majesty. *Śrī Pañcamī* is also the traditional date chosen by the Oriyā youth for starting physical training. Indeed, sport is a form of learning; furthermore, it is natural for the people to start practising sports in this fresh period of the year.

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[173] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[174] D.N. Patnaik, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

The tradition of human sacrifice in Orissa

The ritual practice of human sacrifice, having now practically disappeared from India, was not confined to the sole Indian world. Indeed, many primitive cultures as well as a certain number of more advanced civilizations, either of the Ancient World and of the New one, were characterised by cults prescribing the observance of this bloody sacrificial rite. The common derivation of the different traditions of human sacrifice from fertility magic complexes of the Neolithic origin appears clear from the study of the cults that included this practice among their sacrificial rites. Such cults prevailed in different historical epochs in the American continent (the Toltec, Aztec, Maya and Incaic civilizations), some regions of Black Africa, the eastern and central areas of the Mediterranean basin (the ancient Etruscan, Phoenician and Minoan civilizations), the Melanesian Archipelago and the greater part of the Indian sub-continent and of the Indian Archipelago.

According to M. Eliade the religious significance of this extreme and dramatic form of blood sacrifice derives from the archaic theory of the periodic regeneration of the sacred forces of nature. In the opinion of this scholar human sacrifice was but the 'ritual repetition' of the act of creation as performed at the beginning of the universe through the dismemberment of the celestial body of a Supreme Being. The vegetable kingdom in particular was believed in many primitive societies to have originated from the blood and flesh of a mythical primordial being. The regenerative power of plants and crops was esteemed to get powerfully reinforced by the ritual repetition of this cosmogonic sacrifice, which was usually achieved through the dismemberment of the body of a human victim conceived as the earthly projection of the body of the mythic creator of the universe. This conception underlay all forms of blood sacrifice, both human and animal; yet in some cultural areas the regenerative power attributed to the immolation of human beings, especially in the time of famines, of epidemics, of drought or of harvest, is likely to have suited at best to soothe, until recent times, the anxiety and fear complex of the people for the ever-dreaded non-perpetuation of the sacred forces of nature.[175] This archaic sacrificial doctrine also constituted the ground for the development of the tradition of human sacrifice in India.

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[175] M. Eliade, *op. cit.*, pp. 354-61.

HUMAN SACRIFICE IN ANCIENT INDIA

According to the Vedic cosmogony the universe was manifested through the dismemberment of the shapeless body of the cosmic serpent Vṛtra, which event constituted, at one time, the prime cause of the multiplicity of the creation and the original sin of Indra and the other gods, who broke in this way the initial unity (or non-duality) of the cosmos. The *Saṁhitās* and the *Brāhmaṇas* give a modified form of the same cosmogonic myth in which Vṛtra is replaced by the Universal Puruṣa, offered as a sacrifice by the gods in order to manifest the cosmos. The body of the Universal Puruṣa, like that of Vṛtra, was dismembered into numberless pieces which originated all what exists in the universe. A.K. Coomaraswamy has argued that Vṛtra is the same as the Universal Puruṣa, who refused self-sacrifice and was consequently depicted as an *asura*. All the forms of sacrifice having historically developed within the fold of the Brāhmaṇical religion, irrespective of whether they are performed in a ritualistic and public fashion or, more intimately, inside one's consciousness, are conceived as ritual repetitions of the primeval sacrifice that gave origin to the universal manifestation (*sṛṣṭi*) and, at the same time, as acts of ritual expiation aimed at restoring the original metaphysical equilibrium violated by the sacrifice of the *puruṣa*, viz., at reintegrating the Manifold into the One by reconstituting, through Sacrifice, the unity of the Absolute from the fragments of the cosmic manifestation.[176]

Blood sacrifices involving the ritual killing of human victims were rather diffused in India during the Vedic period, most likely as a result of the culture contact of the Āryan-speakers with the indigenous peoples of India. The Vedic form of human sacrifice, admitted that it has ever existed, was completely abolished in a very remote epoch (but a section of scholars question the actual performance of human sacrifices in the orthodox spheres of Brāhmaṇism in the course of the Vedic and post-Vedic periods); be that as it may, this sacrificial rite was subsequently perpetuated and continued — more or less openly according to the historical circumstances — by the adepts of Śākta-Tantrism, a religious undercurrent closely allied with the non-Vedic religions of India.[177]

The Vedic Indians termed the rite of human sacrifice as *puruṣamedha*. Some passages from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* suggest that the sacrifice of human beings, modelled on the myth of the self-sacrifice performed by the Universal Puruṣa to manifest the cosmos, was a way to ensure the periodical renewal of the creative process.[178] This ancient mythic tradition appears to be nothing but the Sanskritised version of the above-mentioned archaic theory, the traces of which can be found all over the world, about the fundamental importance of the sacrifice of human beings as a means to regenerate the exhausted forces of nature.

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[176] H. Zimmer, *Miti e sumboli dell'India*, Milano, 1993, pp. 171-2, n. 1 (by A.K. Coomaraswamy); G.G. Filippi, 'On Some Sacrifical Features of the Mahiṣamardinī', *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Rivista della Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature straniere dell'Università di Venezia*, vol. XXXII (1993), Serie Orientale No. 24, pp. 173-6.

[177] H. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, pp. 69-71; J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

The practice of human sacrifice in proto-historic India appears to have been closely connected with Yakṣa cult, that is, with the most ancient strata of folk religion connected with the propitiation of tree-spirits and divinities of fertility.[179] Human sacrifices were possibly performed by the ancient inhabitants of the Indus Valley, as may be evinced by a famous seal, unearthed at Harappa (*ca.* 2000 BC), depicting a man who is brandishing a sickle-shaped object and approaching a seated figure with dishevelled hair and the hands raised in supplication. On the back of this seal is depicted a naked female figure shown upside down with legs wide apart, with plants issuing from her womb and with two tigers standing at her left side; according to J. Marshall, this figure may represent Mother Earth or, at any rate, a divinity of fertility connected with the most ancient strata of Yakṣa cult.[180] Thus, the seal at issue might constitute the earliest archaeological evidence of the practice of human sacrifice in India as a way to please Mother Earth.

It seems that the ritual practice of offering to goddesses human sacrifices, central to the meaning and logic of Śakti-worship, is extremely ancient in India.[181] Human sacrifices meant as a system to renew the fertilising energies of the earth (conceived as a goddess) are known to have been performed by tradition until well into the nineteenth century by some important and numerous Dravidian-speaking tribes settled in Middle India, such as the Kondhs and the Gonds. In the Assamese region the Naga and Garo tribes still practise a form of ritual head-hunting that is followed by the exposure of the skulls of the victims on the village huts as a means to propitiate the spirits of the fields. These tribes once used to sacrifice by decapitation their prisoners of war and slaves and to render a cultus to the skulls of their dead ancestors. Assam is also rich in social relics of the matriarchal type, which circumstance authorises one to draw a connection between the gruesome cults under discussion and some pristine form of Śakti cult. Religious traditions akin to those prevalent in tribal Assam are also noticed among some Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic tribes settled in Burma, bordering on Assam to the east. Head-hunting (associated in certain cases with fertility magic rites) and the immolation of human victims (prisoners of war, slaves) were once much widespread over Indonesia and the Philippines too, where mother-right is believed by some scholars to have been once a very important institution, if not the dominant one, of primitive societies.[182]

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[178] M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

[179] A.K. Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*, Pt. II, p. 28.

[180] J. Marshall, *Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization*, London, 1931, I, p. 52.

[181] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

In India, as discussed in chapter 2, the cultic complex formed by the said archaic religious practices (human sacrifice, head-hunting, the veneration of skulls, fertility magic and erotic rites associated with spirit- and ancestor-worships) appears to have undergone a radical process of Sanskritisation in the course of the early medieval period. Owing above all to the action of proselytism led by the Kāpālikas and other similar Tāntric sects, these awe-inspiring tribal rites, the area of diffusion of which extended from India to Melanesia, were made subservient to the allied cults of Śiva and the Devī. The ancient and medieval maritime contacts between India and South-East Asia, which were also of the cultural type, may have contributed to extend the influence of the primitive forms of cult practised by the Indonesian tribes over the southern and eastern coastal regions of India (Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu). Similarly, the hypothesised culture contact of the Kāpālika and other Tāntric sects with the non-Āryan tribes settled in Assam and Middle India may have played a prominent role in the phase of Āryanisation of the practice of human sacrifice.

The non-Āryan traditions of human sacrifice, connected with the most archaic strata of the interrelated Yakṣa and Mother Earth cults, and the similar traditions characterising, as a whole, the religiousness of a vast range of ethnic groups of South and South-East Asia, belonging to the Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman and Austronesian human stocks, were, thus, amalgamated into the Hindu form of human sacrifice, conceived above all as an extreme form of devotion to the universal Śakti in her destructive, merciless and bloodthirsty manifestations (above all, Durgā, Caṇḍī, Kālī and Cāmuṇḍā).

The historical Śākta-Tāntric form of human sacrifice was first of all meant as a magical way to potentiate the fertility of crops and the vegetative growth of plants. Feeding the great Goddess, identified with Mother Earth, with the blood of sacrificial victims, both animal and human, was believed by the Śākta devotees to ensure the cyclic renewal of the life sap contained in rivers, pools, clouds and the whole of the vegetable world. The inexhaustible and awesome hunger of the goddess, personifying the world as a living organism, can be only satisfied through the ritual outpouring of blood (there is no getting without giving). As the Mahādevī incessantly nourishes the world with her fertility power, so she must be incessantly renourished with fresh life energies so as to periodically regenerate the exhausted potentialities of the earth as a living organism.[183] This somewhat mechanic and organicistic conception of the eternal cycle of life, death, birth and rebirth was, in all evidence, deeply influenced by the practices of imitative magic associated with fertility rituals resorted to from time immemorial by the non-Āryan peoples of the Indian sub-continent to propitiate the deities and spirits of the natural world.

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[182] R. Biasutti, *et al.*, *Le razze e i popoli della terra*, 4th edn., Torino, 1967, II, pp. 612, 696-7, 757, 774 and 778-9.

[183] D. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-50.

In certain cases, such as at the shrine of goddess Kāmākhyā in Assam,[184] the victim of the sacrifice (who, as per the age-old Śākta tradition, had to be a handsome and healthy male youth, and in no case a criminal or an enemy[185]) became virtually deified inasmuch as all the gods were believed to enter his body at the time of his immolation. The half-deification of the human victim was also a characteristic feature of the *Meriah* sacrificial tradition prevalent till recent times among the Kondhs of Orissa. Also in this case the victim had to be preferably a young boy, although girls too are known to have been sacrificed by the Kondhs to their earth goddess.[186]

In the opinion of some scholars,[187] however, the veneration of a supposedly universal great Goddess of life and death, incessantly demanding animal or human sacrifices from man to warrant the continuity of the creative process by her presided over, was a later and degenerated form of the religion of the Stone Age, in which life, and not death, was at the centre of all things. In such a perspective, the Neolithic goddess-cults pivoted upon the immolation of animal or human victims would be the corruption of an earlier universal religion much more elevated on the spiritual plane than the former. The world cannot be governed by death, otherwise life would not be so persistent and prolific. Therefore, the awful, wrathful and sanguinary forms of the Mahādevī popularised by medieval Tantrism, which were modelled, at least under some aspects, on the archetypes provided by the still prevalently Neolithic tribal societies of India (and, perhaps, of the South-East Asian countries too), might have represented the final product of the process of degeneration into violence, cruelty and barbarity of the non-violent religiousness, extolling above all the forces of life and regeneration, which seemingly prevailed throughout the world during the Stone Age.

In North India, the earliest literary mentions of the sacrifice of human victims in honour of this or that form of the great Goddess are respectively found in the works of Bāṇabhaṭṭa (seventh century AD), Vākpati (eighth century AD) and Bhavabhūti (idem). In his works *Kādambarī and Harṣacarita* the Sanskrit poet Bāṇabhaṭṭa, who lived at the Court of king Harṣa of Kanauj, describes the cruel and sanguinary goddess-cult of the wild and primitive Śavaras of Middle India, who, according to him, regarded the practice of human sacrifice as a very meritorious religious act. Vākpati, in the Prākṛt historical poem entitled *Gauḍavaha* he dedicated to Harṣa's successor Yaśovarman, provides a picture of the awful cave-shrine of goddess Vindhyavāsinī, the slayer of the buffalo-demon, worshipped with daily human sacrifices by the Śavaras settled in the region of the Vindhyas. The *Mālatīmādhava* of Bhavabhūti, a dramatist who also lived at the Court of king Yaśovarman, relates to a temple presided over by goddess Cāmuṇḍā, to whom a group of Kāpālikas used to offer human sacrifices at regular intervals. A Kāpālika initiate kidnaps the heroine of that drama with the intention of sacrificing her to his dreadful goddess.[188]

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[184] J. Gonda, *Le religioni dell'India. L'Induismo recente*, p. 270.

[185] A. Daniélou, *Śiva e Dioniso*, p. 164.

[186] M. Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

[187] J. Campbell, *et al.*, *I nomi dell Dea. Il femminile nella divinitá*, Roma, 1992, p. 51 (Editor's note).

Coming now to South India, a still earlier literary work, the Tamil epic known as *Maṇimekalai* (composed around the second-third centuries AD[189]), describes a devī temple in which there was a sacrificial altar surrounded by posts from which severed human heads were hung. This is probably, if not certainly, a reference to the mode of practising human sacrifice in honour of goddesses as anciently current in the Tamil country. Other times, especially in South India, self-immolation was performed in a symbolic way through self-mutilation or the offering of one's own blood before the goddess. During the Pallava period (*ca.* AD 325-800) one of the most extreme forms of Durgā-worship resorted to by the Tamils was the offering of *navakaṇḍam*, i.e., of flesh from nine parts of one's own body, which did not involve the death of the self-immolating devotee. Yet the existence of ritual suicide too, usually performed by the warriors through self-decapitation while hanging from a tree with the head inserted in between two of its branches (as is evinced from a series of Pallava sculptural panels and by some literary references contained in the Tamil epic narratives), is known to have constituted in the past an extreme act of devotion to Durgā in South India. The offering of one's own head to the great goddess was peculiar to the spirituality and the religious customs of the Dravidian warriors, who in this way paid the deity the prize for having conferred them the victory in battle in response to their prayers.[190]

The spiritual significance of the Śākta practice of human sacrifice was finally sanctioned by a number of Purāṇic and Tāntric works composed in the later medieval period, chief among which is the *Kālikā Purāṇa*. Chapter 71 of this text relates to human sacrifice (*narabali*) and the offering of one's own blood and pieces of flesh to the goddess. Kings are there given detailed directions for the correct performance of Śākta human sacrifices.[191] It seems likely that, in the perspective of later medieval Tantrism, the performance of human sacrifices had become a powerful means to spiritual self-realisation for the initiates in that, with satisfying the Devī's thirst for human blood, the sacrificial victim was believed to cause the obliteration of all the sins of the person who offered the sacrifice. In the developed form of human sacrifice as performed by the Śāktas, the offering of the victim's blood to the goddess, thus, combined a two-fold function, namely, that of nourishing the goddess in order to regenerate her power, and that of purifying the *karma* of the sacrificer who, thanks to a process of sympathetic magic, was thought to have the faculty to discharge all of his spiritual impurities and imperfections onto the sacrificial victim. While commingling with Śākta-Tantrism the practice of human sacrifice, performed in primitive societies for the benefit of the entire community, became associated with the satisfaction of the sacrificer's particular desires and with the achievement, by the grace of the goddess, of particular *siddhis* (superhuman abilities), thus assuming a much more markedly 'individualistic' character.

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[188] A.K. Bhattacharya, 'A Nonaryan Aspect of the Devī', pp. 58-9; N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-7.

[189] A. Daniélou, *Storia dell'India*, Roma, 1984, p. 46.

[190] T.V. Mahalingam, *art. cit.*, p. 27.

[191] R.C. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

HUMAN SACRIFICE AMONG THE TRIBALS OF ORISSA

Coming now to the case of Orissa, it must be firstly pointed out here that the practice of offering to goddesses human sacrifices was in vogue among some of the tribal and folk communities of the State until the second half of the nineteenth century. A great deal of mythic and legendary traditions, both tribal and Hindu, testify to the past observance of this ritual practice all over the territory of Orissa.

It seems that in ancient times large sections of the Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic peoples of Kaliṅga resorted to human sacrifice as a way to propitiate the spirits of the soil, of waters and of vegetation (all connected in various ways with the figure of Mother Earth) and to secure the abundance of crops and food gathering. Also in proto-historic Kaliṅga, as elsewhere in the world during the Neolithic age, the ritual immolation of human victims to female deities or spirits (conceived as projections or manifestations of the one and only earth-goddess) must have been looked upon as a magical means to stimulate the vegetative growth of plants. The practice of human sacrifice as a way to pay homage to the autochthonous goddesses and win the support of their tribal and semi-tribal worshippers was adopted by the Āryan conquerors of Orissa when they came into touch with the aboriginal cultures of the land (let us say, from the time of Aśoka). During the early medieval period, the Kāpālikas and other similar Tāntric sects which flourished in the country under the Bhauma rule made human sacrifice a canonical ritualistic performance at many temples dedicated to the terrific forms of the Devī, Cāmuṇḍā in particular. These powerful and dreaded figures of priest-magicians did but frame the primitive forms of human sacrifice pertaining to the autochthonous female-oriented cults of Orissa into an esoteric cult pattern, more consonant with the Tāntric religiousness of the ruling classes of the country. These Tāntric ascetics were most likely in constant touch with the tribal and semi-tribal communities settled in the forest-clad hill tracts of inland Orissa, from which they borrowed a good deal of their magic doctrines and rites.

The supreme experts in the art of black-magic and in the practice of human sacrifice in Orissa have been the Kondhs ever since. The Kondh custom of human sacrifice in honour of the earth-goddess, commonly known as *Meriah*, was suppressed with difficulty by the British authorities in the mid-part of the nineteenth century; in spite of this, new cases of *Meriah*, or official demands for performing it, were constantly recorded by the British till the end of their rule over India. The practice of the *Meriah*, as it was soon clear to the British scholars and authorities, was not confined to the sole Kondhs, but extended to a section of their tribal and Hindu neighbours settled in western and south-western Orissa. In fact, certain communities of Hindu peasants inhabiting those provinces used, from time immemorial, to sacrifice human victims to their *grāma-devatās* or, at any rate, to terrific forms of the Devī under the impulse of tragic events, famines, drought, religious-pattern dreams or the inspiration of their shamans and diviners.[192]

The cultural significance of the *Meriah* sacrifice has been discussed by many eminent anthropologists, for which reason only a few hints on it will be given here. The *Meriah* was meant to ensure immunity from various diseases and to warrant good crops, especially of turmeric (which, according to the Kondh beliefs, could not have a deep red colour unless human blood was outpoured on the fields where it was cultivated). The sacrificial rite was performed to propitiate the Kondh earth-goddess, Tari Penu or Dharni Penu. The victim, he himself called *Meriah*, was often a child or a young boy, who had either to be purchased (often after having been kidnapped from the plains) or born of a victim father. Some very poor Kondh tribesmen used to sell their children as sacrificial victims to the inhabitants of other villages. Sometimes the victims were allowed to grow up, lead a happy and well-off life, and even marry. The wife of a *Meriah* was destined to become, in her turn, a *Meriah*, and so were the children born by the couple. The day preceding the appointed day for the sacrifice, the *Meriah* was dressed up in new clothes, taken in procession through the village streets, and finally tied up to a wooden pole erected in the wild jungle. There his body was besmeared with oil, clarified butter and turmeric, and he was offered flower garlands. He was paid homage by the people as if he were a god; the relics made out of his clothes and ornaments were considered most sacred. The whole night preceding the *Meriah* sacrifice was spent in dancing, singing and playing music amidst the general intoxication of the participants. These orgiastic ceremonies, meant to celebrate the fecundity of nature, were protracted till noon the next day, when the sacrifice proper started. The young victim, usually intoxicated and stupefied with opium, was killed by resorting to a congeries of systems: he could be alternatively strangled, crushed while being firmly tied to a wooden pole, cut to pieces while being dragged by the frenzied people along the fields or after having been tied to a revolving post, burnt on fire, decapitated, beaten violently with heavy metal bangles, etc. All the onlookers, as well as the representatives of other villages invited to the ceremony, received from the chief priest-shaman of Dharni Penu a bit of the flesh of the *Meriah*; these bleeding relics, immediately sent to several other villages besides the one where the sacrifice had been performed, were ceremonially buried by the heads of the Kondh clans under the fields. The *Meriah*'s head and bones were burnt and subsequently strewn over the fields.

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[192] V. Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, pp. 692-3.

Both these rituals were believed to ensure good crops in the land in that the stripes of flesh as well as the ashes of the *Meriah* were regarded as divine agents of fertilisation.[193] The *Meriah* sacrifice was believed to bring prosperity and safety not only to the Kondh farmers, but also to the rest of mankind. Indeed, the propitiation of the earth-goddess with human sacrifices was conceived by the Kondhs as necessary to protect the world, in that it caused the deity to lay aside, for some time, her inborn anger and to stop bringing calamities to mankind. In the intentions of the Kondhs, the *Meriah* sacrifice was, thus, offered for the benefit of the entire human race.[194]

Also another important Dravidian-speaking tribal people of Orissa, the Gonds, are known to have been anciently accustomed to the practice of human sacrifice. The Gonds, now settled in the Orissan hill districts bordering upon Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, have been from the hoary past the worshippers of the pillar-goddess (or pole-goddess) Stambheśvarī, who was also greatly venerated by their Dravidian-speaking kinsmen the Kondhs.[195] It is interesting to notice that Tari Penu or Dharni Penu, the earth-goddess of the Kondhs, was identified with the wooden pole to which human victims were once tied up during the performance of the *Meriah* sacrifice.[196] For all the above reasons it seems likely that the propitiation of Stambheśvarī with regular human sacrifices was once largely prevalent in the areas of Orissa inhabited by the Kondhs and Gonds. As a proof of the correctness of such a hypothesis, some Hindu legends of Orissa associated with Stambheśvarī shrines bear covert reference to the practice of human sacrifice. Such references can be found, for instance, in the legends attached to the shrine of goddess Khambheśvarī of Aska in Ganjam district and to the one of the sylvan goddess Birukhomb of Kendupada in Koraput district, who are two different forms of the pillar-goddess Stambheśvarī.[197]

Myths relating to human sacrifices or to the sacrifice of a semi-divine being as a means adopted by the gods to originate rains, plants or seeds are met with among the Parengas and the Jhorias, two tribes of Koraput district, as well as among their Kondh neighbours.[198] On the contrary, from the available records it is not possible to ascertain whether the Śavaras or Saoras, a very prominent Austro-Asiatic tribe that influenced very much the evolution of folk Hinduism in Orissa, ever practised human sacrifice. In fact, even though the historical Śavaras — who were possibly the ancestors of the Saora tribesmen now settled in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh — are stated in many ancient and medieval literary works to have had an inclination toward human sacrifice, the latter practice actually forms no part of the ritual and mythic traditions of the Hill Saoras of south-western Orissa (who perhaps constitute the one and only still culturally uncontaminated branch of that ancient people). It is probable that the Saoras of Orissa never performed human sacrifices, and that the Śavaras mentioned by Sanskrit and Prākṛt authors as the champions of this sacrificial practice were actually a group of tribes settled in Middle India, some of them half-Hinduised, who worshipped goddesses as their chief divinities and, at the same time, fiercely opposed the political and military penetration of the Āryan element into their lands.[199] Large groups of tribes of different stocks were previously termed together by the Āryans as Śavaras.

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[193] N. R. Hota, 'Human Sacrifice among the Khonds of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. VIII, Nos. 3 and 4, pp. 158-63; M. Eliade, *op. cit.*, pp. 357-8.

[194] M. Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

[195] N.K. Sahu, *op. cit.*, pp. 352-3.

[196] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 545 ff.

[197] A.K. Rath, *Studies on Some Aspects of the History and Culture of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1987, p. 107; R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-4.

[198] V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-3, 164-5, 269-70 and 492.

In conclusion, the areas of the present State of Orissa where the belief in the efficacy of human sacrifices was more rooted in tribal religions were the western and south-western ones, populated by the Kondhs and the Gonds. It is, thus, no wonder that the Śākta temples of Orissa at which human sacrifices were once performed by the Hindus are concentrated, for the most part, in those areas, forming the modern Ganjam, Koraput, Kalahandi, Phulbani and Sambalpur districts.

ŚĀKTISM AND HUMAN SACRIFICE IN ORISSA

The Kondh fashion of human sacrifice, or *Meriah*, was probably being adopted all through the term of the medieval period — with some slight modifications in the associated rituals meant to encounter the favour of the Hindu rulers and the people at large — at a number of Hinduised Śākta shrines scattered over the area of the Māls, a vast region of jungles and hills prevalently inhabited by the Kondh ethnic group, which is partly situated in the old district of Ganjam and partly in that of Phulbani (another name for which is Baudh-Khondmals, from Baudh, the ancient capital of the Hindu rulers of the region, and Khondmals, i.e., the Kondh Hills).

A Hinduised form of the *Meriah* sacrifice was certainly in vogue in the past at Tārā-Tāriṇī *pīṭha*, a Śākta shrine lying on the top of a solitary hillock overlooking the river Rishikulya in the vicinity of Purushottampur (Ganjam district), as well as at the two shrines dedicated in the Khondmals to the Hinduised Kondh goddess Baṛārāul, the one at Balaskumpa, the other at Bandhagarh.[200] The twin goddesses Tārā and Tāriṇī, mention of whom has been made on several other occasions in the present work, are worshipped in a temple, recently built on the top of a high hill, in the shape of two stones, regarded as the breasts of the great Goddess in accordance with the well-known theological doctrine about the origin of all Śākta *pīṭha*s from the severed limbs of Satī's corpse, having fallen from the sky while Śiva was roaming about the universe in insanity. A local legend explains the duplication of the representative image of the Devī at this *pīṭha* with maintaining that Durgā herself, after having lived for some time at the spot under the guise of two beautiful young sisters, made the latter disappear to install them as one deity to be worshipped in the form of two stones.[201] Tārā and Tāriṇī, two eminently Tāntric forms of the Hindu great Goddess, find mention in Sanskrit literature since the times of the *Mahābhārata*,[202] yet the designation of the presiding deity of this Śākta shrine as Tārā-Tāriṇī might also bear some reference to the Kondh earth goddess, Tari Penu or Tara Penu. The fact that both deities are crudely fashioned in stone like tribal idols, as well as the prevalence of human sacrifices at the shrine till the advent of the British rule in Orissa, seem to testify to the Kondh origin of this cult, which, as observed in chapter 2, was probably Sanskritised during the early medieval period.

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[199] Id., *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, pp. 496-7.

[200] H.C. Das, 'Religious Movements in Southern Orissa', p. 35.

At both the sanctuaries of goddess Baṛārāul in Phulbani district the Devī is worshipped in the shape of an uncarved stone block. The *Meriah* sacrifice has been replaced at both shrines, probably in recent times, by the sacrifice of one buffalo, which is performed, as per the Śākta tradition, during the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā*. The replacement of the *Meriah* victim with the sacrificial buffalo in the Kondh socio-ritual customs was achieved by the British military authorities of the Ganjam and Boudh-Khondmals districts especially in the period of Lord Dalhousie's governor-generalship (1848-56), often with resorting to violent repressive methods that gave rise to a series of Kondh rebellions.[203] Such a process of replacement of human sacrifice with buffalo-sacrifice is very likely to have also involved the two shrines dedicated to Baṛārāul, a Kondh goddess who was, nevertheless, worshipped from centuries also by the Hindu kṣatriyas living in the area. A local historical legend, relating to a tribal war fought for the possession of the representative idol of Baṛārāul at Bhandhagarh, is possibly reminiscent of the past importance attached to this deity by the warrior clans settled in the region of the Māls. Actually, the very name of this goddess appears related to the kṣatriya tradition: the Prākṛt term *baṛā-rāval* designates, in fact, the rank of a class of Hindu princes. Moreover, at both the shrines of Baṛārāul the ceremony of buffalo-sacrifice is presently performed by some kṣatriya priests belonging to the Sudha caste, a formerly warrior community that was once dominant in the Baudh State, while the first offerings to the goddess are traditionally made by the Kondhs, who are regarded as the 'owners' of both shrines. At the shrine of Bhandhagarh in particular, the Hindu priest who kills the buffalo is a Sudha one, while a Kondh tribal priest is appointed with the task of holding the animal's tail.[204] A similar cult pattern, based on the joint propitiation of goddess Baṛārāul by the

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[201] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

[202] K.K. Dasgupta, 'Iconography of Tārā', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 116.

[203] N.R. Hota, *art. cit.*, p. 163; N.K. Sahu, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

[204] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Boudh-Khondmals District Gazetteer*, pp. 373-4.

Hinduised warriors and Kondh tribesmen, may have been prevalent at the two shrines also at the time when the practice of human sacrifice was in vogue there.

Another terrific form of the Devī traditionally worshipped by the people of Phulbani district, Bhairavī, is known to have been propitiated with the sacrifice of human victims in times past. The most famous Śākta-Tāntric centre of the district at which Bhairavī was once offered human sacrifices is Purunakatak, a village situated about 30 km south-east of the royal city of Baudh (an ancient Buddhist centre). Bhairavī of Purunakatak, now represented by a Mahiṣamardinī image, was one of the tutelary deities of the Somavaṁśīs.[205] The goddess is at present venerated in a recently built temple, but was previously worshipped, from time immemorial, in aniconic form inside a thatched hut.[206] Another very eminent Bhairavī temple in the district is the one lying near the royal palace of Baudh. The presiding goddess of this temple was also the *iṣṭa-devatā* of the local *rājās*. Prior to the beginning of the British rule over the Baudh region, these *rājās* used to perform human sacrifices on special occasions, such as before marching for war, building a new village, etc., to obtain the protection of Bhairavī.[207] This dreadful goddess, belonging to the group of the Ten Mahāvidyās and embodying the power of death according to the Śākta-Tāntric esoteric doctrine, appears to have gained prominence in the region as a Sanskritised form of the Kondh earth-goddess, just as Tārā-Tāriṇī and Baṛārāul.

Vyāghra Devī of Kuladha, the ancient family deity of the Bhañjas of Ghumsar (Ganjam district), is another example of an Orissan tribal goddess having been once worshipped with human sacrifices by the Kondhs and their kṣatriya rulers jointly. This deity, represented by a rock projection outcropping from the hill on which her shrine is located, was originally the totemic tiger-goddess of the Kondh tribal chiefs inhabiting the Ghumsar region. Starting from the thirteenth century AD Vyāghra Devī of Kuladha was adopted by the Bhañja feudal rulers as their *iṣṭa-devatā* in order to win the support of the Kondhs and of the Saoras. Still today the priests attached to the shrine belong to the Kondh ethnic group.[208] The prevalence of the practice of human sacrifice at Kuladha in by-gone days is attested in the British records. The practice was stopped only around the middle of the ninteenth century owing to the intervention of the British officers of the Meriah Agency, charged with the hard task of extirpating the ritual custom of the *Meriah* from the region of the Māls. The Meriah Agency had its headquarters at Russelkonda (the modern city of Bhanjanagar), very close to the royal city of Ghumsar and to the royal Śākta shrine of Kuladha (which must have been, thus, one of the first goddess-shrines in the Ghumsar kingdom to be affected by the British repression of the *Meriah*).[209]

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[205] Orally from Dr. H.C. Das.

[206] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Boudh-Khondmals District Gazetteer*, p. 382.

[207] P. Mukherjee, 'Human Sacrifices among the Khonds of Orissa — A Note', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. VIII, Nos. 3 and 4, p. 167.

[208] A.K. Rath, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-8; H.C. Das, *art. cit.*, p. 34.

The *Meriah* sacrifice or some analogous form of human sacrifice, probably more Sanskritised than the former, was also adopted at the celebrated temple of goddess Bhagavatī in the city of Banpur, an ancient religious and political centre situated to the east of the region of the Māls. In the early medieval period the village of Bankada, lying at a short distance from Banpur, was the capital of the Śailodbhava rulers of Koṅgoda, due to the patronage work of whom the formerly tribal cult of the goddess subsequently called Bhagavatī got Sanskritised. This eminent Śākta-Tāntric deity of Ganjam district, represented till recent times by a shapeless stone simulacrum like many other goddesses of the tribal origin, was once propitiated by the Hindu rulers of the area through the sacrifice of human victims who were selected, once in a year, from the family clan of the Balijenās. The descendants of this clan claim that their ancestors were given land grants in exchange for their sacrificing every year one of their family members.[210] The practice of selling or exchanging for valuable things the young members of a poor family or clan for the purpose of immolating them to the earth goddess in the *Meriah* sacrifice was characteristic of the socio-religious customs of the Kondhs till the beginning of the British rule in Orissa, for which reason it may be inferred that the *Meriah* tradition deeply influenced the practice of human sacrifice as performed at the shrine of goddess Bhagavatī in the medieval period.

Human sacrifices in honour of goddesses of the probable tribal origin prevailed, still after the beginning of the British domination, also in the territories ruled over by the *mahārājās* of Jaypur (present Koraput district). At Ramgiri near Jaypur human victims were sacrificed by the Hindus to a goddess who was supposed to reside at the bottom of a three-feet-deep hole. The head of the victim was forced into the hole and then the priest of the goddess cut his throat from ear to ear. The blood was made to flood to the bottom of the hole where the deity was imagined to dwell. This sacrifice, clearly meant as a ritual of fecundation of Mother Earth with the blood of a human being, was hiddenly performed by the priest of the goddess with his assistants. On the contrary, at Laksmanpur, another Hindu village lying in the Jaypur area, the whole population assisted at the human sacrifices in honour of a local goddess. On the other hand, human sacrifices were occasionally performed at the very temple of Kanaka Durgā, the *iṣṭa-devatā* of the *rāj* family of Jaypur. The immolation of human victims in honour of Goddesses was a common ritual performance in the Jaypur ex-State on the occasion of *Durgā-Pūjā*. This tradition, besides being influenced by the Kondh practice of the *Meriah* — the flower garlands adorning the animals sacrificed at the temple of Kanaka Durgā during *Durgā-Pūjā* are still now called *Meriah-puṣpas*, i.e., the 'flowers of the *Meriah*', may have also been influenced by the war rites diffused among the Gond feudal chiefs of the neighbouring Bastar, who used to offer extensive human sacrifices in honour of their tutelary deity Danteśvarī (a form of Kālī) before marching for battle.[211]

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[209] H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, pp. 152-7; N.R. Hota, *art. cit.*, p. 163.

[210] *Vijaya*, Madras and Bhubaneswar, November 1995, p. 31 (in Oriyā).

The Gond tradition of human sacrifice may also have been at the origin of the observance of this sanguinary rite at the temple of goddess Laṅkeśvarī at Junagarh (Kalahandi district). In the eleventh and twelfth centuries AD, indeed, Junagarh on the river Tel, the initial capital city of the Nāgavaṁśīs of Kalahandi (a royal dynasty of the possible Gond origin), was the seat of occasional human sacrifices in honour of Laṅkeśvarī, a regional goddess worshipped also at Sonepur on the Mahanadi, who acted in that period as the tutelary deity of this Nāga dynasty. The ancient name of the city of Junagarh, Junabali (Old-Sacrifice), retains a clear memory of this ritual practice.[212]

During the medieval period the ramifications of the Kondh tradition of the *Meriah* reached, in all probability, some important Śākta centres situated in the middle Mahanadi Valley to the east of the vast area of jungles and hills historically inhabited by the Kondhs. For instance, goddess Bhaṭṭārikā of Baramba, represented till recent times by a portion of the hillock overlooking the Mahanadi, on which her temple was subsequently built in such a way as to incorporate the projecting rock in question, is stated in some legends to have been worshipped in the past with human sacrifices. One of such ancient legends runs that once a crocodile, one of the animals sacred to the Devī, caught a twelve-year-old child in the river Mahanadi and left him before Bhaṭṭārikā temple. The priest of the goddess started feeding the child everyday to prepare him for the sacrifice. On the night of *Mahāṣṭamī* the priest cut the body of the boy into sixteen parts for the sixteen sister goddesses of Bhaṭṭārikā. Since that day the sacrificing system based on the immolation of human beings started at this Śākta shrine, to be eventually stopped a few centuries back.[213] The ritual custom consisting in dismembering into many pieces the body of the human victim offered as a sacrifice to the goddess is evidently borrowed from the *Meriah* tradition. Another important Śākta shrine in this region, at which the practice of human sacrifice is known to have been resorted to, is Maṇināga Devī temple at Ranpur, a former feudal capital not far from the city of Nayagarh (old Puri district). This serpent-goddess is still today greatly revered by the Kondh tribesmen and by other tribal communities inhabiting the area.[214]

Legends containing covert references to the practice of human sacrifice are also attached to the shrines of goddess Samalei at Sambalpur and goddess Hiṅgulā at Talcher respectively. In the first case, that of Samalei, the goddess is reported to have once tried to devour her priest's daughter when a few drops of sacred water, sprinkled by the priest over the offerings, fell inadvertently on the head of the child. The priest, astonished at the horrible sight, succeeded in stopping the goddess by throwing at her worship image the plate containing the offerings.[215] In the case of Hiṅgulā the legend says that a human sacrifice was actually performed by the founding member of the royal dynasty of Talcher to win the favour of the goddess. Hiṅgulā in person is stated to have suggested the king in dream — thus, committing a kind of an 'act of treachery' — to offer her the head of a fisherman who worshipped the original tutelary deity of Talcher, Tāleśvarī Devī, if the king himself wished to defeat in battle the powerful rulers of the region, the Nalas, of whom Hiṅgulā was then the *iṣṭa-devatā*.[216] It is not known for a certainty whether human sacrifices were performed in times gone by to propitiate these two goddesses; yet, as far as Samalei is concerned, it appears certain that this ritual practice was current in pre-British times at the shrine dedicated to this goddess in the city of Sundargarh in the Gangpur ex-State, lying some 90 km north of Sambalpur.[217]

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[211] P. Mukherjee, *art. cit.*, pp. 166-7; N. Senapati and N.K. Sahu, eds., *Koraput District Gazetteer*, pp. 139-40.

[212] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Kalahandi District Gazetteer*, pp. 53 and 449.

[213] *Vijaya*, Madras and Bhubaneswar, November 1995, pp. 27-9.

[214] K.C. Mishra, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-5; H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, pp. 96-8.

The Śākta ritual of human sacrifice underwent a more pronounced process of Sanskritisation in the north-eastern areas of Orissa and in the coastal districts of the State. Here human victims were specifically sacrificed to Cāmuṇḍā, the chief female deity of the Kāpālika pantheon. The Kāpālikas and the cognate sects were most likely responsible for the introduction of this unorthodox ritual practice into the Śākta cult pattern adhered to by the Hindu ruling classes of those areas of Orissa. At Badasahi near Baripada (Mayurbhanj district), in the medieval period, human sacrifices were probably made with daily frequency to propitiate goddess Pāśacaṇḍī, a most terrific form of Cāmuṇḍā. The site, thus, became famous as Bali-muṇḍali or Bali-naramuṇḍa, a name evidently related to the offering of the sacrificed human beings' heads to the Devī. The skulls of innumerable victims are believed to be still buried in a tank filled with earth located near the ruins of the medieval Pāśacaṇḍī temple, erected by the Bhañja rulers of Mayurbhanj in the tenth-eleventh centuries AD.[218] The wonderfully carved cult image of this goddess was removed long ago to the old royal palace of Baripada, where the members of the Bhañja family still now worship it with devotion.

The Bhañjas of Mayurbhanj are likely to have celebrated human sacrifices also at Khiching, the early medieval capital of their kingdom, either in honour of goddess Kīcakeśvarī (a form of Cāmuṇḍā) or of her divine consort Bhairava — more probably, of the two deities as forming a Tāntric oneness, as it was the cultic norm according to the Kāpālika doctrine. This may be inferred from a scrutiny of the numerous awe-inspiring sculptural panels depicting female figures holding severed heads or *kapālas*, and possibly, in one case, even a rare scene of human sacrifice, which are presently affixed to the outer walls of the reconstructed Kīcakeśvarī and Kutāituṇḍi temples at Khiching. Such sculptures altogether suggest the prevalence of human sacrifices in this royal town in the tenth century AD.[219]

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[215] R.P. Mohapatra, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.

[216] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[217] N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, eds., *Sundargarh District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1975, p. 478.

[218] N.N. Vasu, *The Archaeological Survey of Mayūrbhañja*, Delhi, reprint 1981, pp. LXXV-LXXVI.

The practice of human sacrifice, perhaps fashioned after the ancestral religious traditions of the Hill Bhuiya tribe, is also known to have been once the norm at the shrine of goddess Tāriṇī at Ghatgaon, a forest village in Keonjhar district lying about 70 km to the south of Khiching. As already indicated in chapter 2, this goddess, worshipped from time immemorial in aniconic form, was the tutelary deity of the Keonjhar branch of the Bhañja family.[220] The Bhuiyas, a partly Hinduised Oriyā-speaking tribe, are believed to have originated from the Munda ethnic stock.[221] The main deity of their pantheon, called Ṭhākurāṇī or Bāsuki Mātā (the earth-goddess), was identified with Kālī by their Hindu neighbours. At certain Kālī temples situated in the ex-States of Gangpur, Bonai and Bamra in northern Orissa, human sacrifices were once celebrated by Bhuiya priests.[222] Since the Hill Bhuiyas are known to have exerted a great influence on the Bhañja rulers of Keonjhar, so much so that they had a prerogative of installing every new *rājā* on his accession to the throne,[223] it seems likely that also the family goddess of that royal family, Tāriṇī, was propitiated with human sacrifices under the direct influence of the Bhuiya religious customs.

Medieval temples dedicated to Cāmuṇḍā, at which sacrifices of human beings were performed by the Śāktas, existed in the past in the district of Baleswar (north-eastern Orissa). The three-headed cult image of Cāmuṇḍā presently worshipped in the name of Brahmāṇī in the village of Avana was probably propitiated this way in the Bhauma-kara epoch,[224] while another early medieval image of the same goddess, worshipped as Bhīmā or Kālikā on the seashore at Bhimpur, was likewise propitiated in times past through the sacrifice of human victims as argued by N.N. Vasu.[225] The latter image, wonderfully carved, has now disappeared from the site.

The Kāpālika tradition of human sacrifice in honour of Cāmuṇḍā reached its most

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219. T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, I, Leiden, 1985, pp. 233-4 and 242.

220. H.C. Das, 'Śākta Pīṭhas of Orissa', unpublished manuscript, pp. 118-9.

221. S.C. Roy, *The Hill Bhuiyas of Orissa*, Ranchi, 1935, pp. 18 ff.

222. E.T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnography of Bengal*, Calcutta, reprint 1960, p. 144.

223. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-4.

224. H.C. Das., 'Brāhmaṇical Tāntric art of Orissa', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, vol. XXIX, No. 1, p. 110.

225. N.N. Vasu, *op. cit.*, pp. LXVI-LXIX.

elaborate form in the coastal plains of central Orissa. As already indicated in chapter 4, a large number of shrines dedicated to this fearful and blood-thirsty form of the Devī was established in that region in the course of the Bhauma period. Among these, the Kāpālika fashion of human sacrifice was perhaps practised in that period at the old temple of Cāmuṇḍā at Niali, having now collapsed. This is suggested by a local legend associated with the terrific Cāmuṇḍā image presently worshipped as Caṇḍaghaṇṭā or as Haracaṇḍī on the west side of Śobhaneśvara Śiva temple at Niali, according to which the goddess once used to frequent the place in the guise of Mohinī, the Enchantress, to attract men and then devour them.[226] On the contrary, there can be little doubt as to the performance of human sacrifices by the Kāpālikas attached in the Bhauma-kara period to the Vaitāl Deul of Bhubaneswar (which is also presided over by a Cāmuṇḍā image).

> The temple of the Kāpālikas, now known as Vaitāla, was a shrine for sacrificing human beings. . . . The basement of a stone *yūpa* which was utilised for the sacrifice, is still to be found in front of the door of the Vaitāla temple. Unlike the cellas of other temples where light and shade intermingle to create a serene atmosphere, the sanctum of the Vaitāla is intensely dark. The seriousness of the awful esoteric rites that were once performed here, must have been heightened by the darkness of the cella and by the presence of some images in their most terrific forms.[227]

The depiction of *kapāla*s and of uplifted knives in the hands of the Tāntric deities represented within the sanctum of the temple constitutes a further evidence of the past prevalence of human sacrifices there.

The performance of human sacrifices by the Kāpālikas at the Orissan temples dedicated to the terrific forms of the Devī, chief among which was Cāmuṇḍā, was certainly accompanied by magical and esoteric rites of which very little is known. It may be tentatively suggested here that such rites marked the difference between the practice of human sacrifice as performed at the Kāpālika-dominated shrines and the same practice as performed at the semi-tribal Śākta shrines of inland Orissa. The Bhauma-kara kings, in all likelihood, fostered the sanguinary religious practices of the Kāpālikas in the very heart of their dominions on account of their representing a culturally more elevated form of the similar religious practices diffused in the less Hinduised areas of the vast Bhauma kingdom.

In the Bhauma period the practice of human sacrifice in honour of Cāmuṇḍā was probably diffused over the entire coastal belt of Orissa, yet the Somavaṁśīs and their dynastic successors succeeded in confining it by degrees to certain secluded or peripheral Śākta-Tāntric pockets situated in the hinterlands of the country, with this causing the decline of this archaic sacrificial tradition at the main Śākta pilgrimage centres included in the Orissan kingdom.

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[226] P.K. Ray, ed., *Archaeological Survey Report 1974-75: Prachi Valley*, Bhubaneswar, 1975, pp. 11 and 32.

[227] K.C. Panigrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

Conclusion

THE subject, 'Śakti Cult in Orissa' has been studied after the ethno-historical approach, tentatively tracing its origin from the pre-proto-historic period down to the late medieval epoch with a little annexation of its continuity into the modern period. The origin of Śakti cult, which is virtually a conglomeration of various cross-cultural trends, non-Āryan and Āryan, having developed over the ages in the Indian sub-continent, is historically traced back to the Indus Valley civilization, wherein the unearthed terracotta seals, bronzes and steatite figurines, as well as the painted potteries, clearly identify the prevalence of the worship of the female principle. Sir J. Marshall, on the basis of these seals as well as of the ones depicting the yogic god identified as the so-called proto-Śiva, was prone to indicate that Śaivism and Śāktism were the main forms of religion prevalent in the Indus Valley civilization. This kind of cultural tradition of male-female deity worship was found to have developed at the same time in the Zhob and Kulli cultures of Baluchistan. This archaeological evidence of the earliest known cultural efflorescence of India prompt us to believe that this kind of religious tradition was in those times much widespread among the indigenous peoples of the sub-continent.

The archaic spiritual beliefs related to the figure of Mother Earth, who was to the Neolithic populations of India the *summum bonum* of life, the dispenser of both life and death, the fertile deity of the soil, moon and waters and the guardian of the underworld, appear to be still prevalent, in some form or other, among some of the primitive Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian tribes as well as other autochthonous ethnic groups. In the pre-Vedic period, as we infer from treatises of eminent anthropologists, sociologists, archaeologists, historians, the worship of the female principle, possibly associated in the socio-cultural sphere with the predominance of mother-right, was the main trend of the indigenous peoples of India. The close association and devotion to Mother Earth by the present-day non-Āryan tribes, the prevalence of matriarchy among some tribes of north-eastern and southern India, the propitiation of aniconic goddesses with a system of animal and (in the past) human sacrifices, the propitiation of ancestral spirits linked to them, the terrible *nāgas* and *yakṣas* connected with them in the cult for their fertilising, mysterious and awe-inspiring powers, the shamanistic rites meant ecstatically for communion with these deities and their allied spirits, all emphasise the female principle and suggest its continuity among the people of India since the times of the Indus Valley civilization.

The indigenous (Austro-Asiatic-*cum*-Dravidian) cultural trends dominated by the female principle confronted the Vedic male-dominated culture complex in the course of the Āryans' slow advance into the mainland of India. The social and cultural confrontation of patriarchal and pre-patriarchal (if not matriarchal) traditions gave gradually rise to an assimilation of traits from both sides and finally to an integration. Particularly during the period of composition of the *Atharvaveda*, when a great deal of magico-religious elements of the non-Āryan origin were incorporated into the Vedic context highlighting both Vedic and non-Vedic deities and religious practices, a kind of conglomerated religion with wider scope emerged. The *mantra-yantra* element became an essential part of the worship pattern of the divinities in a so-called Tāntric form. This emerged religion, toward the end of the Atharvavedic period, had a great bearing on the autochthonous religious systems of the country. The esoteric Tāntric system of propitiation of the gods and goddesses appears to have been adopted both by the Āryan people and the tribal communities in different regions of India. Thus, it is not unreasonable to infer that the autochthonous peoples that once lived in the part of the country forming the object of the present work (Orissa) and some others who still live in Middle India have been maintaining the ancient rites in their traditional religious patterns (possibly including some Vedic rites too).

With this at the background of religio-cultural evolution in India I have, in the beginning of the work, attempted to speak of the propitiation of female deities by the Austro-Asiatic- and Dravidian-speaking tribes of the State such as, for instance, the Kondhs (the Dravidian-speaking ethnic group distributed over vast tracts of southern and south-western Orissa in different branches like Kuttia Kondh, Dongria Kondh, Desia Kondh, Pengu Kondh, Takria Kondh, Konda Dora, etc.), the Gonds, Oraons and Koyas (also speaking Dravidian languages or dialects), the Gadabas, Bondos and Hill Saoras of south-western Orissa (the most primitive Austro-Asiatic-speaking tribes), other Austo-Asiatic speakers such as the Mundas, Juangs, Santals, Hill Kharias of the northern and north-eastern districts of the State, and the Āryanised Hill Bhuiyas. All of these tribal groups maintained through the ages their peculiar practices in the worship of female deities in aniconic form and with blood sacrifices, which in the past gave rise to the development of Hindu goddesses. I feel expedient here to mention how certain gods and goddesses of the autochthonous tribal religions of Orissa, such as the pillar-deity Stambheśvarī or Khambheśvarī, goddesses represented by large projections of stone (Laṅkeśvarī at Sonepur, Vyāghra Devī at Kuladha, Bhaṭṭārikā at Baramba) or by smaller pieces of stone (Tārā-Tāriṇī near Purushottampur, Tāriṇī at Ghatgaon, Kondhuṇī Devī at Suruda, Kālījāi of Chilika Lake, Bhagavatī at Banpur, Samalei at Sambalpur) and, lastly, the wooden cult images of the Jagannātha Trinity, originally propitiated by the Saoras, exemplify the anthropomorphisation of the tribal deities and their final inclusion into the fold of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism.

To sum up in this context, the Śākta religion in Orissa, just as elsewhere in India, is a conglomeration of indigenous (non-Āryan) trends and Sanskritic or, at any rate, more elevated trends of the sophisticated people. Such trends are so inextricably commingled that it is not possible to demarcate one from the other. The system of interchange, diffusion, assimilation and integration has been a historical process from time immemorial. As a consequence of this process, some of the present-day goddesses of all-Orissa importance with their origins in the non-Hindu communities have been elevated to eminence as forms of the Mahādevī.

In the historical period the monarchs, élites and common people made it a principle to worship the already established gods and goddesses disregarding their complicated origins, but accepting them as their patron deities. A codified system of worship pattern was to be necessarily associated with the gods and goddesses to make them popular in the society.

The ancient history of India is generally traced from the time of the Mauryas in the fourth century BC. As such, the gods and goddesses of the historical period came to be worshipped from that time onwards. To repeat here once again, the history of goddess-cults in Orissa can be traced from the time of Aśoka in the third century BC, when *nāga-nāgī* and *yakṣa-yakṣī* groups (somewhat in colossal demonic forms) were represented for the first time in stone statues along with other forms of sculptural art. The sculptures pertaining to these two cults found in large number in and around the city of Bhubaneswar, the then centre of the Mauryan power in the Kaliṅgan province, virtually represent the earliest nucleus of Śakti cult in visual form.

In fact, in the whole of India Śakti cult and other cults of the Brāhmaṇical religion emerged in sculptural form along with the abodes of divinities (the nuclei of the later temples) under the direct patronage of the illustrious Gupta monarchs. The compilation of the epics, Purāṇas, Āgamas, Tantras and other religious texts, the carving of the images of gods and goddesses based on the prescribed iconographies and their installation in the temples and monasteries (in the case of the Buddhist religion), the popularisation of the main centres of religious and cultural importance revolutionised the arcane of the Hindu religious system. The monarchs of the Gupta dynasty evidently revitalised the Hindu religion, which had got a set-back due to the spread of Buddhism under the Mauryas, Kuṣāṇas and Sātavāhanas. They fodstered in particular Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism-Śāktism, as is glimpsed from their epigraphic, numismatic, sculptural and architectural remains. The new orientation of the Hindu religion, accompanied by vast production of sacred literature, became a mass religion attracting people from all strata of the society.

So far as Orissa is concerned, the earliest Śākta pilgrimage centre with the earliest image of Durgā in Mahiṣamardinī form (Virajā of Jajpur) is connected with the Gupta cultural movement. The Gupta renaissance set in all branches of learning became a major trend in the subsequent medieval period and was followed by almost all the Hindu dynasties of India.

This statement also holds good in the case of Orissa, ruled by different dynasties successively from the post-Gupta to the later medieval period.

The post-Gupta period (sixth-seventh centuries AD) was marked in Orissa for the rise of Śaivism in close alliance with Śāktism. The Śailodbhavas of Koṅgoda, although they were staunch Śaivas in their faith, paid reverence to the Śakti in different forms and to the Mādhava form of Viṣṇu as attested by sculptural evidence of Śiva, Śakti and Viṣṇu in the extant temples at Bhubaneswar, Bankada (their capital city) and on the Mahendra mountain. They, in fact, led the foundation of the earliest *rekha* and *piḍhā* temples, an architectural trend that became more prominent in the subsequent periods.

The Bhauma-karas, who succeeded the Śailodbhavas in the eighth century AD, conquered and acquired a vast kingdom known as Oḍra or Utkala and became more prolific in the resurgence of religious faiths, art and architecture. The earlier trends of Śaivism and Śāktism were more elaborated with the amalgamation of Tantrism. In this glorious epoch Tāntric elements were considered essential, to vie with the all-India context, in reflecting Śaivism, Śāktism and Buddhism in Orissa. As a result of this, the terrific forms of Śiva, of the Devī and of Vajrayānic gods and goddesses developed and were adored in accordance with the Tāntric mode of worship pattern. The rapid ascent of Tāntric religiousness further led to the erection of Hindu temples and Buddhist monasteries and to the emergence of several important Śākta-Tāntric centres in Orissa. This new system also necessitated the esoteric priestly services of a special class of Tāntric practitioners well-versed in magico-religious rituals and blood sacrifices. The Kaula-Kāpālika sects appear to have reinforced the age-old magico-religious and sacrificial systems, prevalent in the non-Hindu communities, in the Śākta-Tāntric centres or to have introduced them therein in a Sanskritised form. The archaeological evidence in support of this are abundant in Orissa. The *pañca-makāra* (five M's) system of worship stimulated the depiction of erotic couples on the temple walls; in the earlier group of Orissan temples erotic imagery was in an experimental stage, being depicted inconspicuously, but it was more profusely developed in later temples, especially starting from the Somavaṁśī period.

The Bhauma epoch is also marked for social transformation necessitating the allegiance of the people to the newly-developed cults in the Śākta-Tāntric centres by creating a sort of grim atmosphere with the illustration of many manifestations of Śakti such as Sapta- or Aṣṭamātṛkās, Nava Kātyāyanīs, Sixty-Four Yoginīs and so on. This was considered essential to control the heterogeneous subjects under the rule of the Bhaumas and their feudatories by the multiplication of fierce goddesses in the temples. The Bhaumas appear to have been successful in their introducing this new religious trend.

The Somavaṁśī kings, who ruled over the whole of present-day Orissa and a part of Bengal from the middle of the tenth to the beginning of the twelfth century AD, reinforced the State administration and adopted a laudable policy of temple building activities relating to the Brāhmaṇical religion. Being Śaivas in faith, they could cause the construction of a number of magnificent Śaiva temples at the Śaivite centres of Bhubaneswar, Jajpur and in several places of coastal and inner Orissa, thus, further reflecting the scope of Śaivism-Śāktism. The Kaliṅga School of Art and Architecture initiated in the earlier epochs reached the highest watermark of development under their regime. The religious system they introduced, to a great extent changed that of the Bhauma-karas, in many case discouraging the esoteric Tāntric practices of their predecessors. In fact, the benign aspect of Tantrism — what is termed as *dakṣiṇācāra* in opposition to the *vāmācāra* system — was introduced under their rule in the Śākta shrines of Orissa.

The Somavaṁśī monarchs, while consolidating the socio-political structures of their State, reinforced Śaivism and Śāktism and revitalised the Brāhmaṇical religion as a whole with the performance of the *aśvamedha-yajña* (horse-sacrifice) at Jajpur. For the systematic performance of this sacrifice in accordance with the old Vedic rites, thousands of brāhmaṇas from central India (well-versed in the religious scriptures and settled in *śāsanas*, separate settlements for the higher type of imported brāhmaṇas, providing them land grants and other necessary facilities) were called to Jajpur. The famous Daśāśvamedha *ghāṭ* on the bank of the river Vaitarani at Jajpur, adjacent to the Saptamātṛkā shrine, substantiate the fact as recorded in the *Mādalā Pāñji* (the chronicle of the temple of Jagannātha at Puri).

Another marked change of this period is noticed in the Śaiva-Śākta temples. Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya were invariably installed as the *pārśva-devatās* in Śaiva temples, with Pārvatī replacing the earlier depiction of Mahiṣamardinī (typical of the Bhauma-kara period). The workmanship of the sculptures and the decorative programme of the temples, flowering with imagery of animal, vegetative, human and celestial worlds, are of superb order. The depiction of various forms of *nāyikās* and amorous couples in seductive poses (*mithunas, maithunas*) as well as of the composite images of Umāmaheśvara, Ardhanārīśvara and Harihara became more prominent in the temple imagery of this period. Thus, the earlier trend of the Kaula-Kāpālika cult system was systematically epitomised in this type of sculptural imagery.

Another speciality of the Somavaṁśī period lies in the multiplication of Śākta shrines, both in the premises of Śaiva temples and in independent seats of Śakti-worship activities. A further salient aspect of this Golden Age of Orissan history, somewhat related to the highlighting of the female principle, was the introduction of music and dance performance by the maidens as a part of the temple rituals (which was turned to a more systematic form of *devadāsī* system during the Gaṅga period). To sum up the development of Śāktism in Orissa during this epoch, we clearly notice the profuse depiction of females in sculptural art and the introduction of sacred dance, exalting feminine beauty, grace, elegance and sensuousness, which were portrayed more crudely in the Bhauma-kara period.

The illustrious Gaṅga (*ca.* AD 1110-1434) and Sūryavaṁśī Gajapati (*ca.* AD 1434-1540) dynasties, who ruled successively over the Kaliṅgan empire stretching from the Ganges in the north to the Godavari in the south (up to the Kaveri under Kapilendra Gajapati) for a long period of about five centuries, setup syncreticism in religions and consolidated the political structure of the State. The Gaṅga epoch that succeeded the Somavaṁśī one is the greatest landmark in the history of Orissa for the construction of the temple of Jagannātha at Puri with the introduction of an elaborate Vaiṣṇava ritualistic pattern, the amalgamation of the earlier trends of cult of Śaivism and Śāktism with the Vaiṣṇava cult of Jagannātha (conferred with the status of the religious as well as political head of the empire), the spread of Vaiṣṇavism thanks to the preaching of great savants like Rāmānuja, Ballabhācārya, Nimbārka and Śrī Caitanya, supplemented with popular religious literature as the medium, the eclectic and tolerant religious policy with the proliferation of the *Pañca-devatā-upāsanā* (the worship system based on the veneration of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti, Sūrya and Gaṇapati simultaneously) in the Vaiṣṇavite garb. Temple building activities were given only a sporadic importance in this period, with the exception of the height of sacred edifices (which was generally increased) and the creation of over-life-size deities and secular figures bearing the exquisite workmanship. The Sun temple at Konarak, the last, greatest and most magnificent monument of the Gaṅga period, built by Nṛsiṁhadeva I in honour of the Sun god in the form of a moving chariot, unmistakably reflects the art tradition of the epoch in finality and the syncretistic religious policy that marked it thanks to the initiative of the monarchs.

Syncreticism of the previously developed Śaivism-Śāktism with Vaiṣṇavism is well-marked in this epoch. To identify such a syncretistic trend we can mention the sculptural representations of Harihara, Umāmaheśvara, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Lakṣmī-Nṛsiṁha, Lakṣmī-Varāha, Durgā-Mādhava and the more elaborate Mahiṣamardinī depicted with Jagannātha and Śiva-*liṅga*. It is significant to note that, although cult syncreticism was the trend of the time, the individuality of Śaiva and Śākta cults was maintained. A great number of Śaiva monuments and a few Śākta temples were erected by the Gaṅga monarchs with the Vaiṣṇavite service pattern.

Another significant trend of this period was the addition of *nāṭa-maṇḍapa* (dancing hall) and *bhoga-maṇḍapa* (offering hall) to the main temples with a view to highlighting the system of temple dancing (the *devadāsī* system). The association of Śakti in different forms as the consort of the male gods and *dikpāla*s (the guardians of the eight directions) was operated through the erection of great and majestic Śākta shrines in the most important religious centres of Orissa (as, for example, the temples of Lakṣmī and Vimalā in the premises of Jagannātha temple, the temple of Pārvatī in the Liṅgarāja complex, and the temple of Chāyā Devī in the Sun temple compound) and the addition of female counterparts to the images of the *dikpālas* in almost all temples built in this period.

The Sūryavaṁśīs maintained to a great extent the tradition of the Gaṅgas, but with more emphasis on the cult of Śrī Jagannātha as the religious and political head of the Kaliṅgan empire. Their political and military activities were merged in their religious policy and propounded in the name of Jagánnātha. The feudal rulers under the Gaṅga and Sūryavaṁśī Gajapati overlordships were greatly responsible for the spread and patronisation of the national cult of Puri Jagannātha in their respective principalities as well as for bringing to eminence a number of national or local Śākta goddesses as their patron deities.

My study of the goddesses of the Hindu pantheon relates that almost all the forms of Hindu *devīs* conceived in the Purāṇas and Tantras and having an all-India eminence evolved in the Kaliṅga country and were nurtured under the patronage of the monarchs and the support of the people. The archaeological evidence in the form of their sculptural representation in the temples, in the sites and scattered here and there throughout the State (which, in my personal estimation, is more complete than in any other State of India), the Orissan *śilpa-śāstras*, the regional Purāṇas, all these belonging to different cultural epochs starting from the Gupta age, bespeak the Śākta efflorescence in Orissa. This land has the distinction of possessing and preserving the Śākta deities, temples, shrines and sites even today with their traditional ritualistic patterns. The regional goddesses of non-Hindu origin are here as important as the manifestations of Śakti of all-India fame. Fortunately most of the shrines (except, of course, those consecrated to the cult of Sixty-Four Yoginīs, now no longer worshipped in the traditional form) are all in working order. The eight well-known Śākta centres of Orissa, popularly identified as the eight eminent Caṇḍī *pīṭhas*, have maintained the sanctity of the goddesses, the traditional worship rites and a rich heritage of temple legends through the vicissitudes of time, signifying the magnanimity and devotion of the monarchs (in the past) and of the people at large. Furthermore, although the Vaiṣṇava trend of worship of the Hindu gods and goddesses is now prevalent at most of the Śākta centres of the State, the age-old folk tradition of animal sacrifices still continues there.

The festivals of national and regional character (may be social or religious), numerous and with varied origins in the distant past, connected with interesting myths, legends and symbolism, are greatly responsible in maintaining the religious traditions of Hinduism. The festivals of Orissa, commingling the traditions of the Brāhmaṇical religion as well as the folk, rural and tribal ones, reflect through their performances in cyclic order round the year the socio-religious milieu. The festivals prevalent in Orissa are so numerous and interconnected with various aspects of the cultures of the people, that I had to select here just some important ones which are strongly and closely associated with Śakti cult. The festivals, vows, ceremonies and rituals discussed in the text, though mainly religious in character, amuse the people of Orissa with recreation and entertainment and free them from the drudgery of monotonous routine life. In the present context, indeed, some of the festivals are as interesting as the video and cinema shows.

Lastly, I may indicate that my study, though comprehensively giving a graphic picture of Śakti cult in Orissa in an ethno-historical perspective, cannot be considered a conclusive one. Village goddesses (*grāma-devatās*), who form an important aspect of Śāktism, could not be dealt with exhaustively, being the writer afraid of the increase in volume of the work.

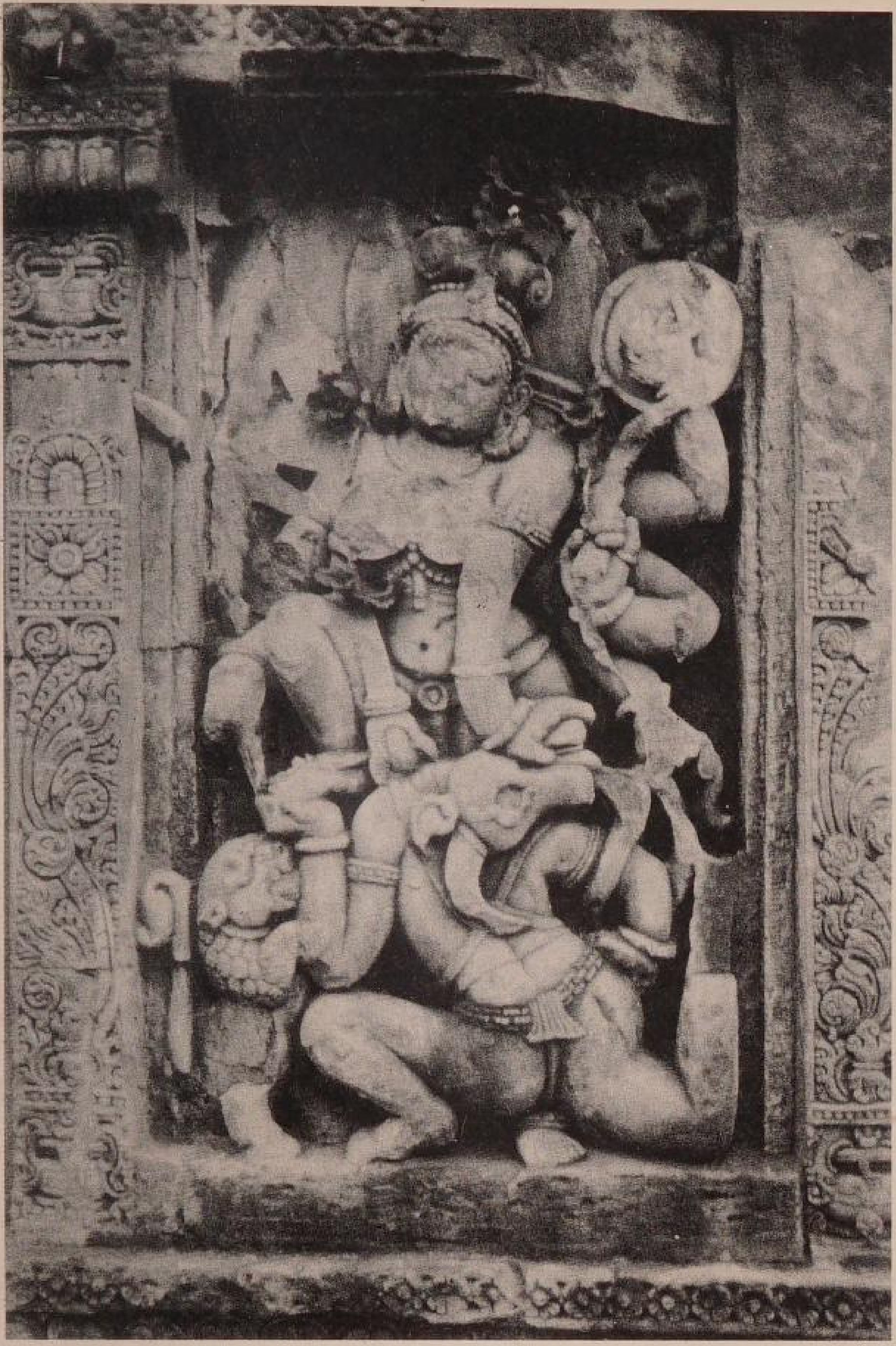


Fig. 1: Mahiṣamardinī; Śiśireśvara temple, Bhubaneswar, eighth century.

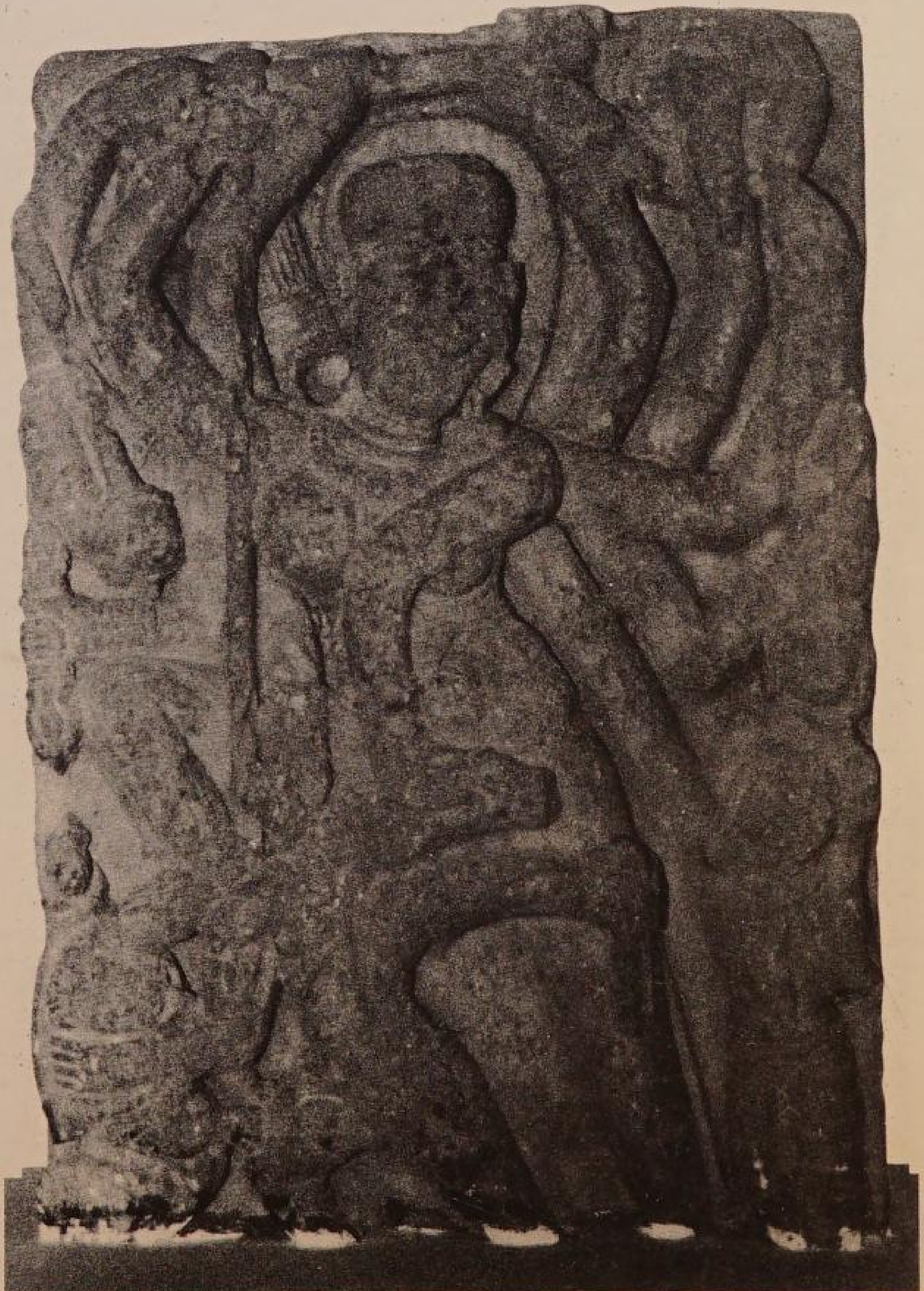


Fig. 2: Mahiṣamardinī; from Dharmasala, Bhubaneswar, *c*. ninth century.

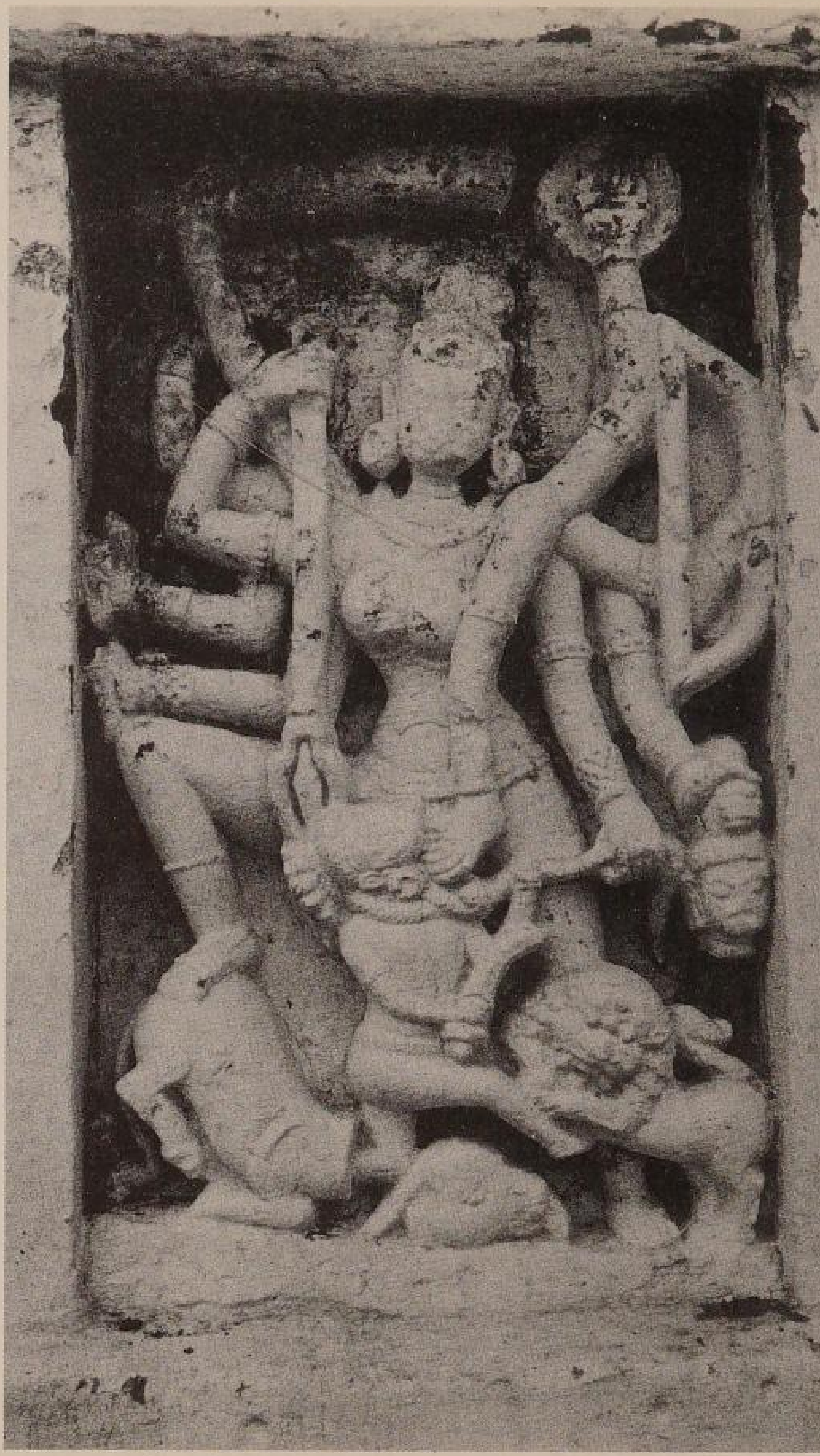


Fig. 3: Mahiṣamardinī; Khajūreśvara temple, Shergarh, ninth or tenth century.

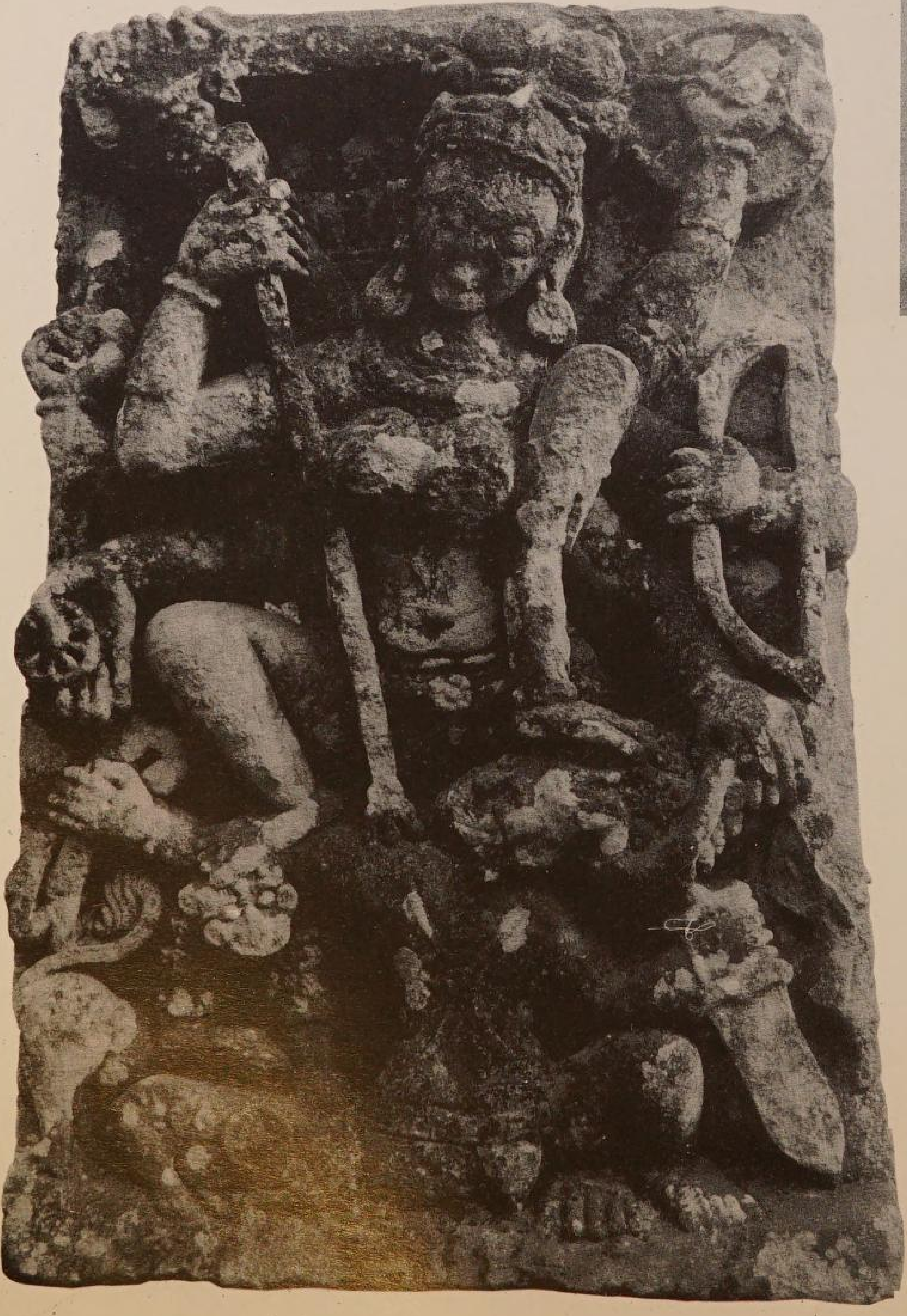


Fig. 4: Loose image of Mahiṣamardinī; Trilocaneśvara temple, Kundesvara, eleventh or twelfth century.

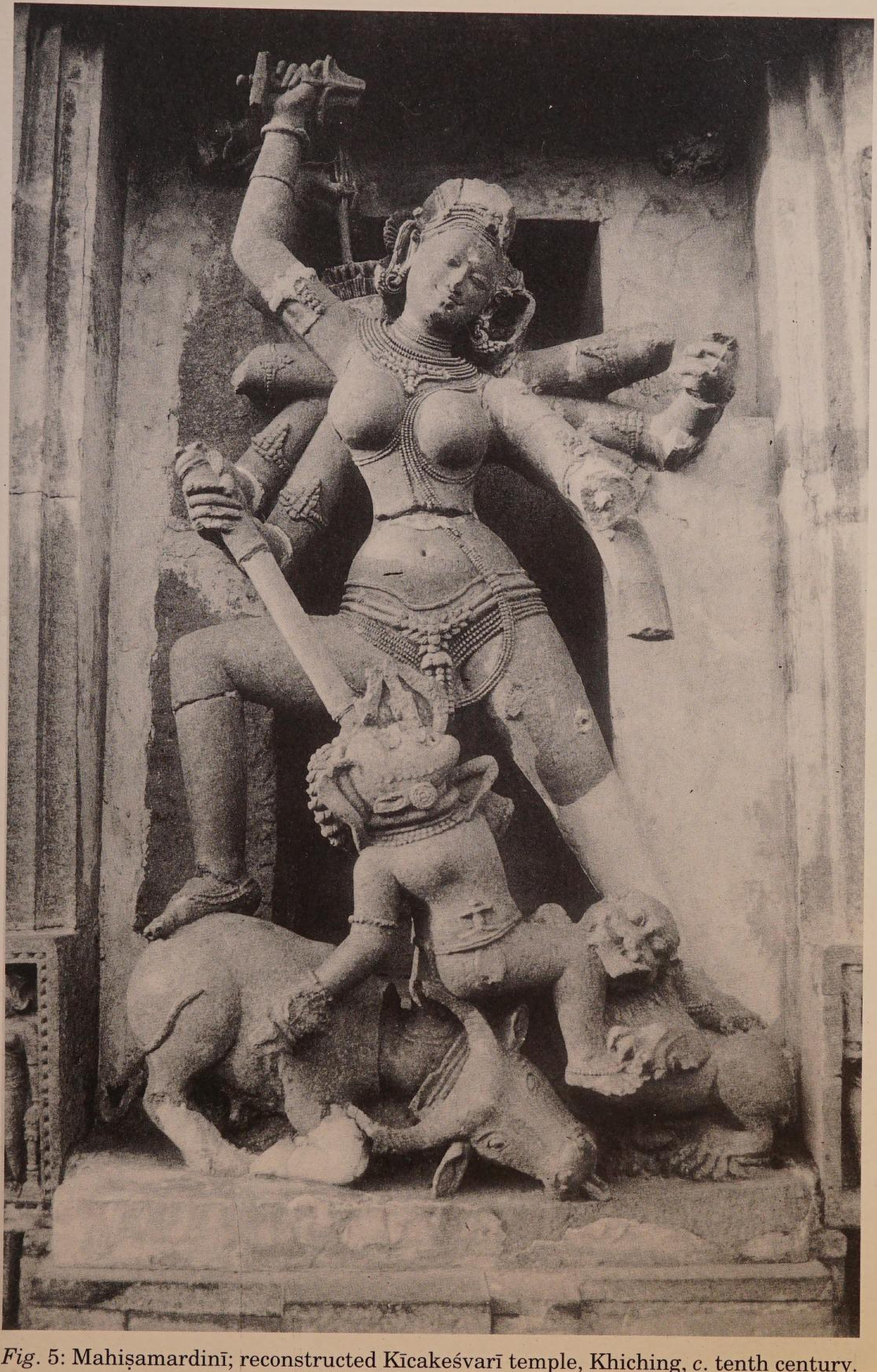


Fig. 5: Mahiṣamardinī; reconstructed Kīcakeśvarī temple, Khiching, *c*. tenth century.

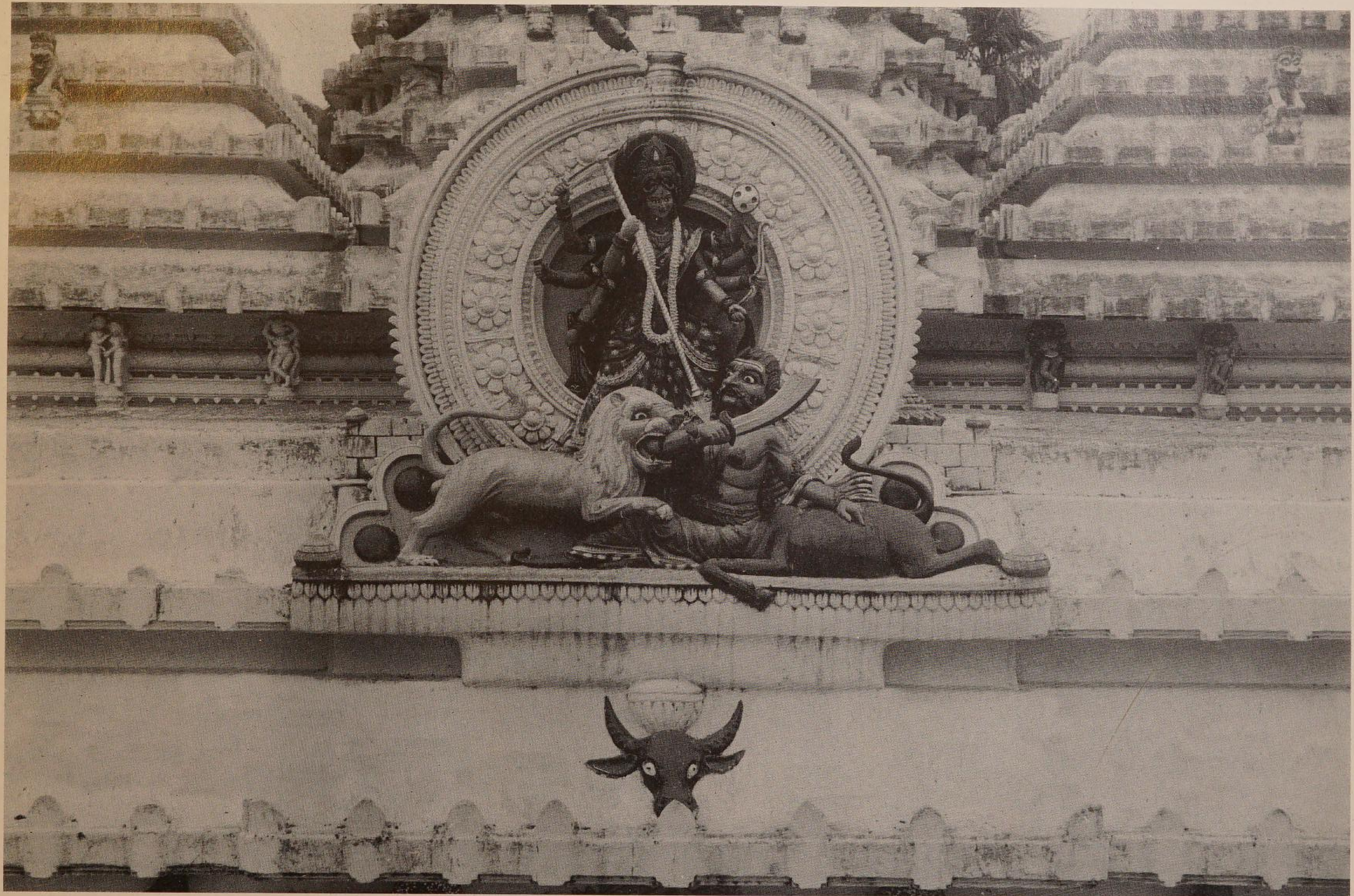


Fig. 6: Polychrome stucco bas-relief depicting Mahiṣamardinī; front porch of Sāralā temple, Jhankad; contemporary.

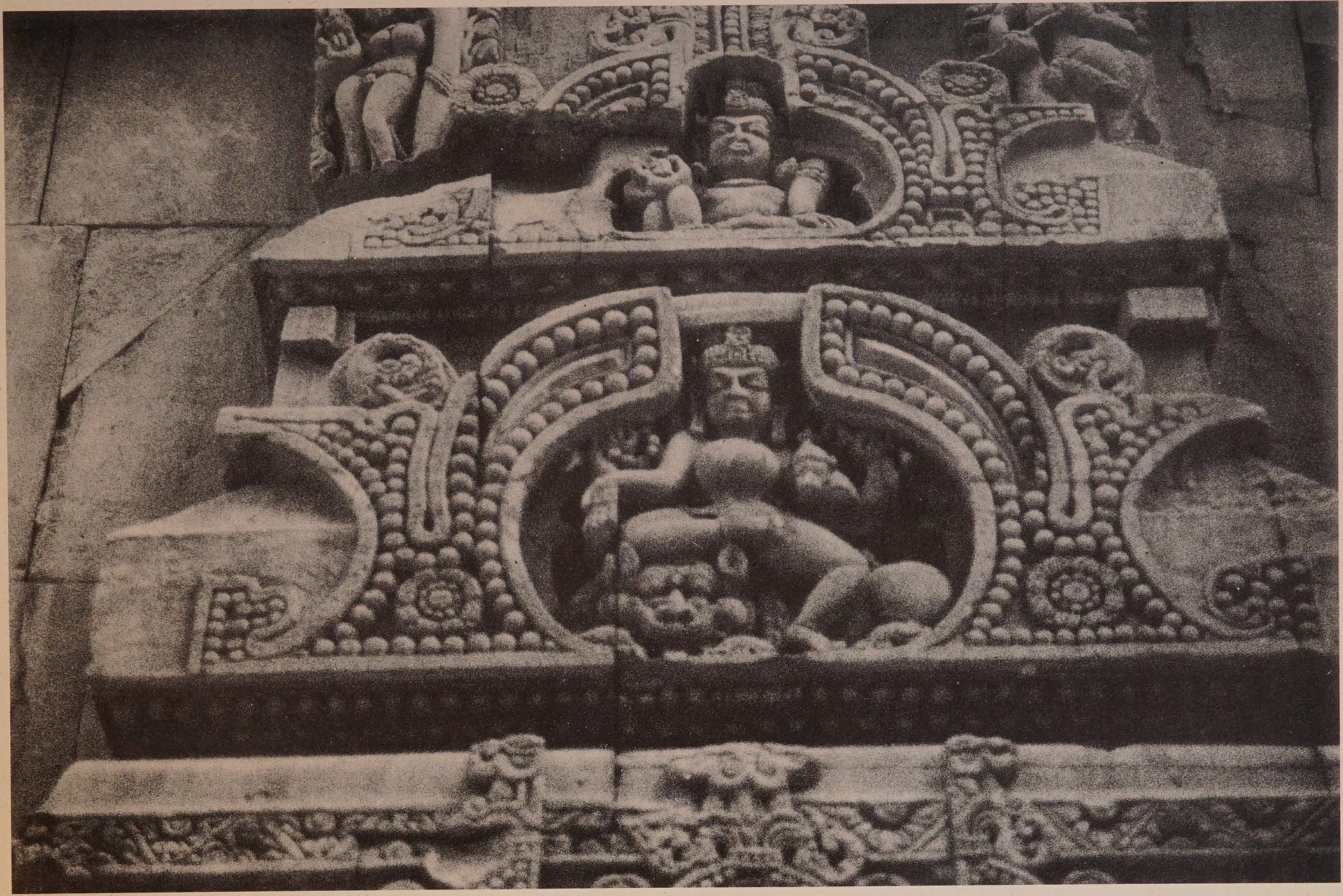


Fig. 7: Siṁhavāhinī Durgā; *caitya* medallion, Paraśurāmeśvara temple, Bhubaneswar, seventh century.

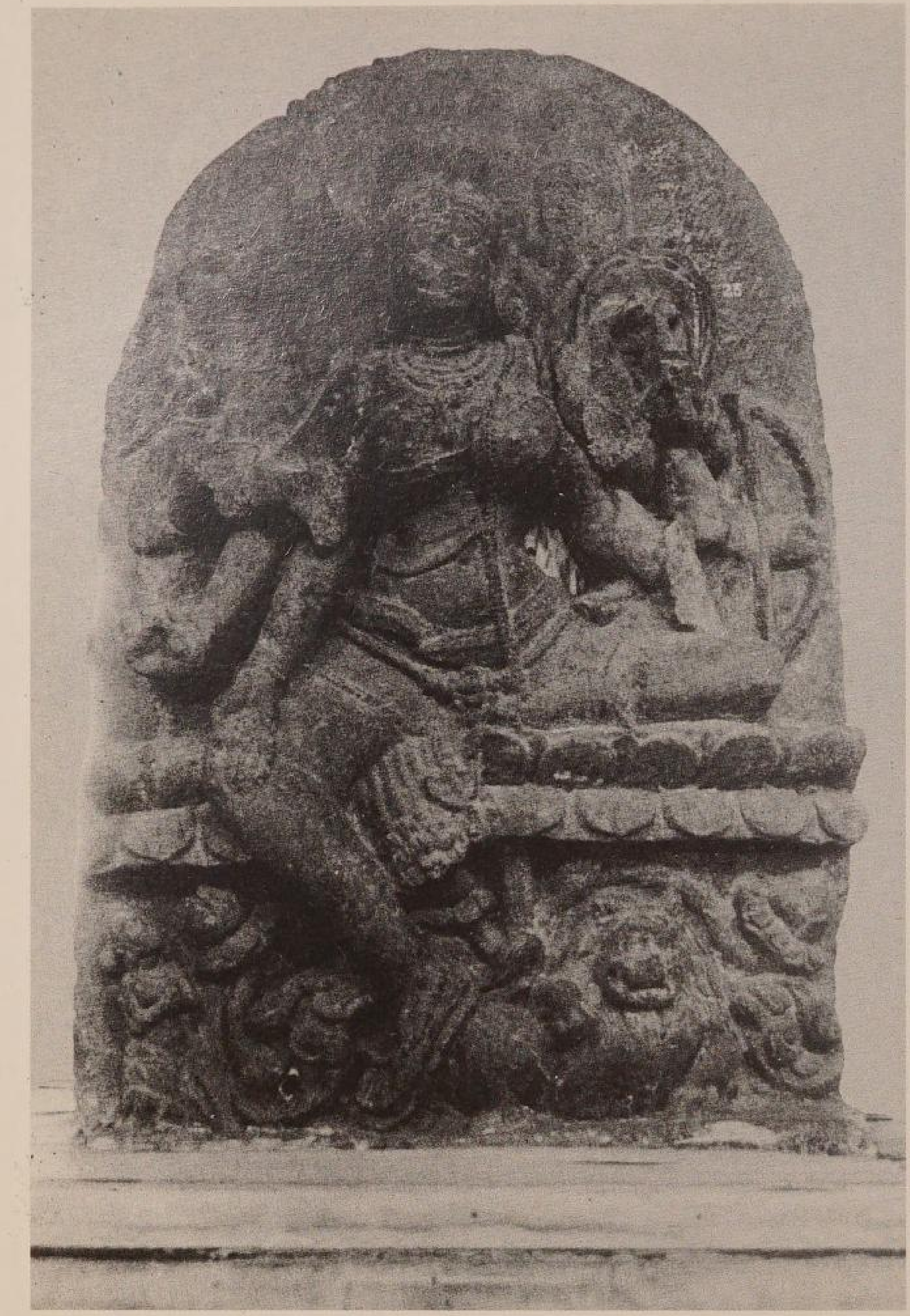


Fig. 8: Siṁhavāhinī Durgā; Khiching Museum, *c*. tenth century.

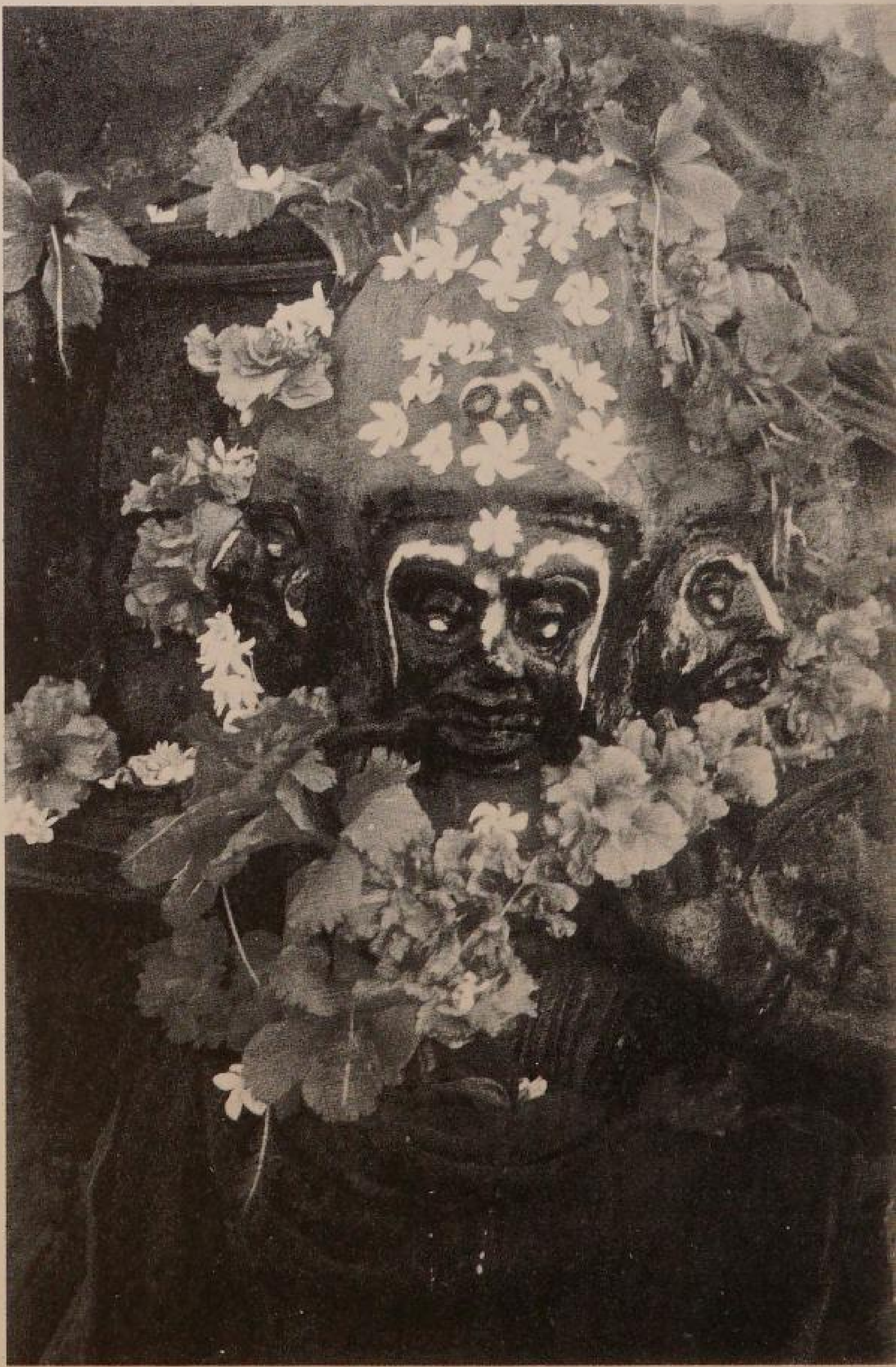


Fig. 9: Three-headed Cāmuṇḍā worshipped as Brahmāṇī; Caṇḍī temple, Avana, eighth or ninth century.

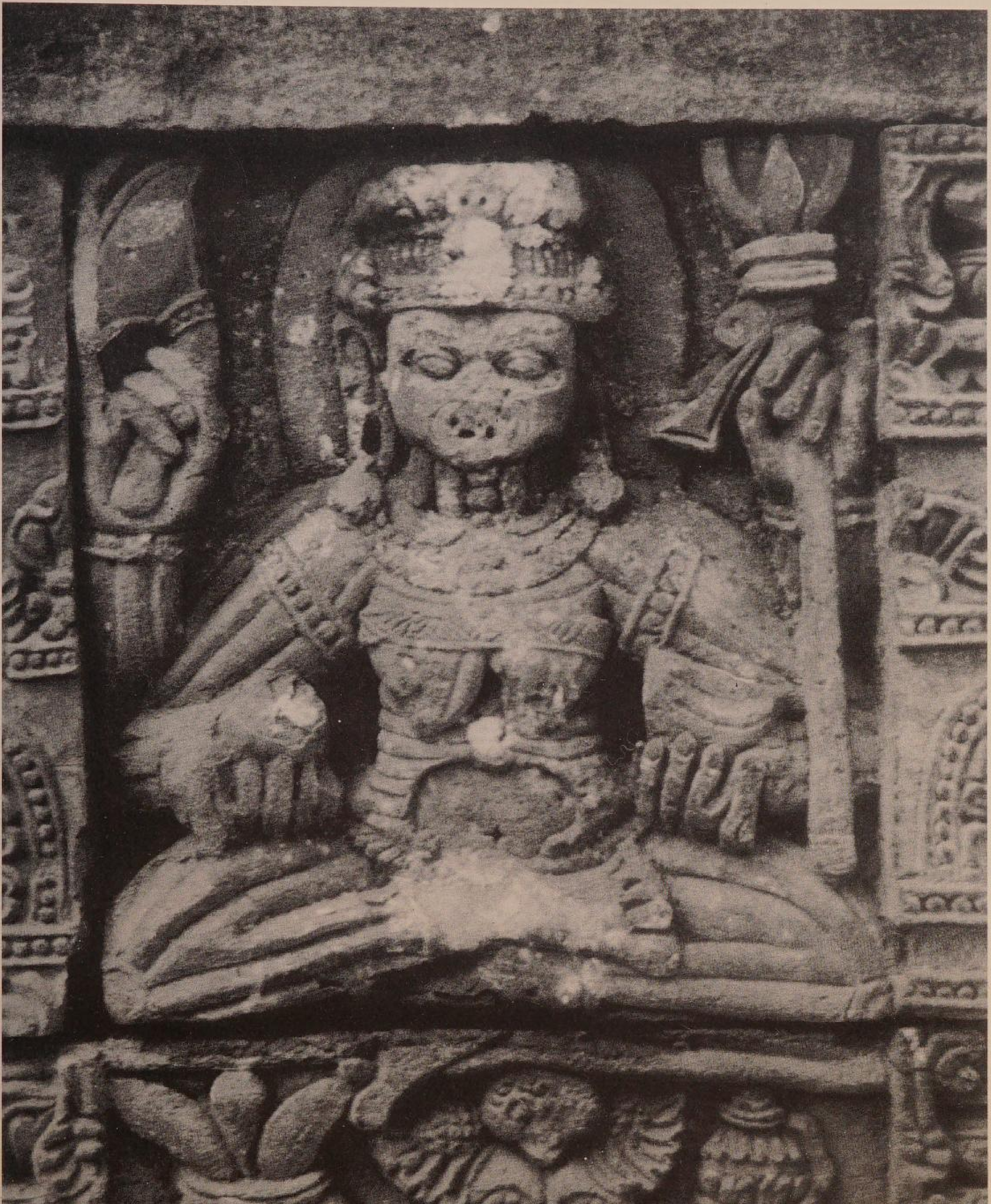


Fig. 10: Cāmuṇḍā; from the Saptamātr̥kā set of Paraśurāmeśvara temple, Bhubaneswar, seventh century.

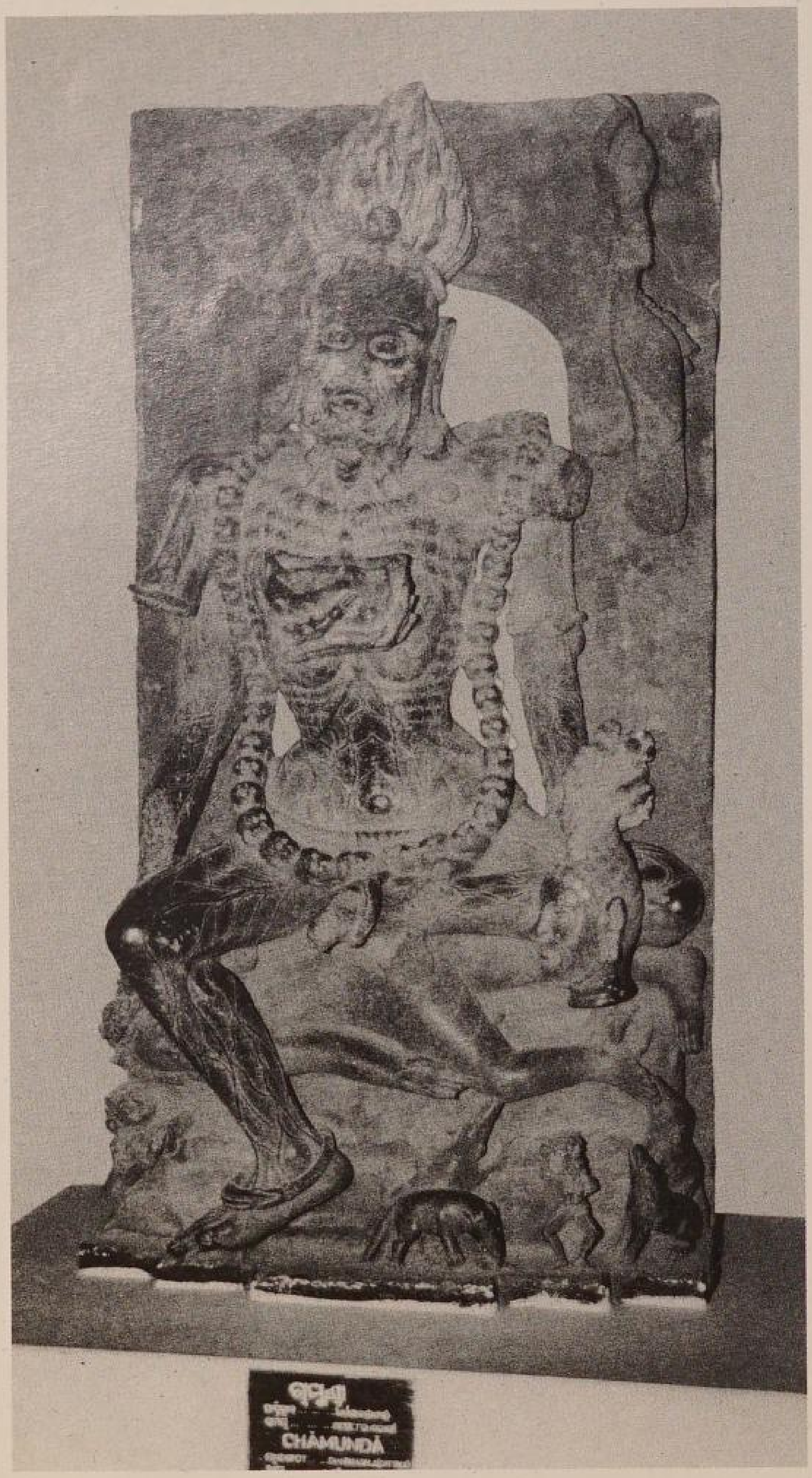


Fig. 11: Cāmuṇḍā; from Dharmasala, Bhubaneswar; datation uncertain.

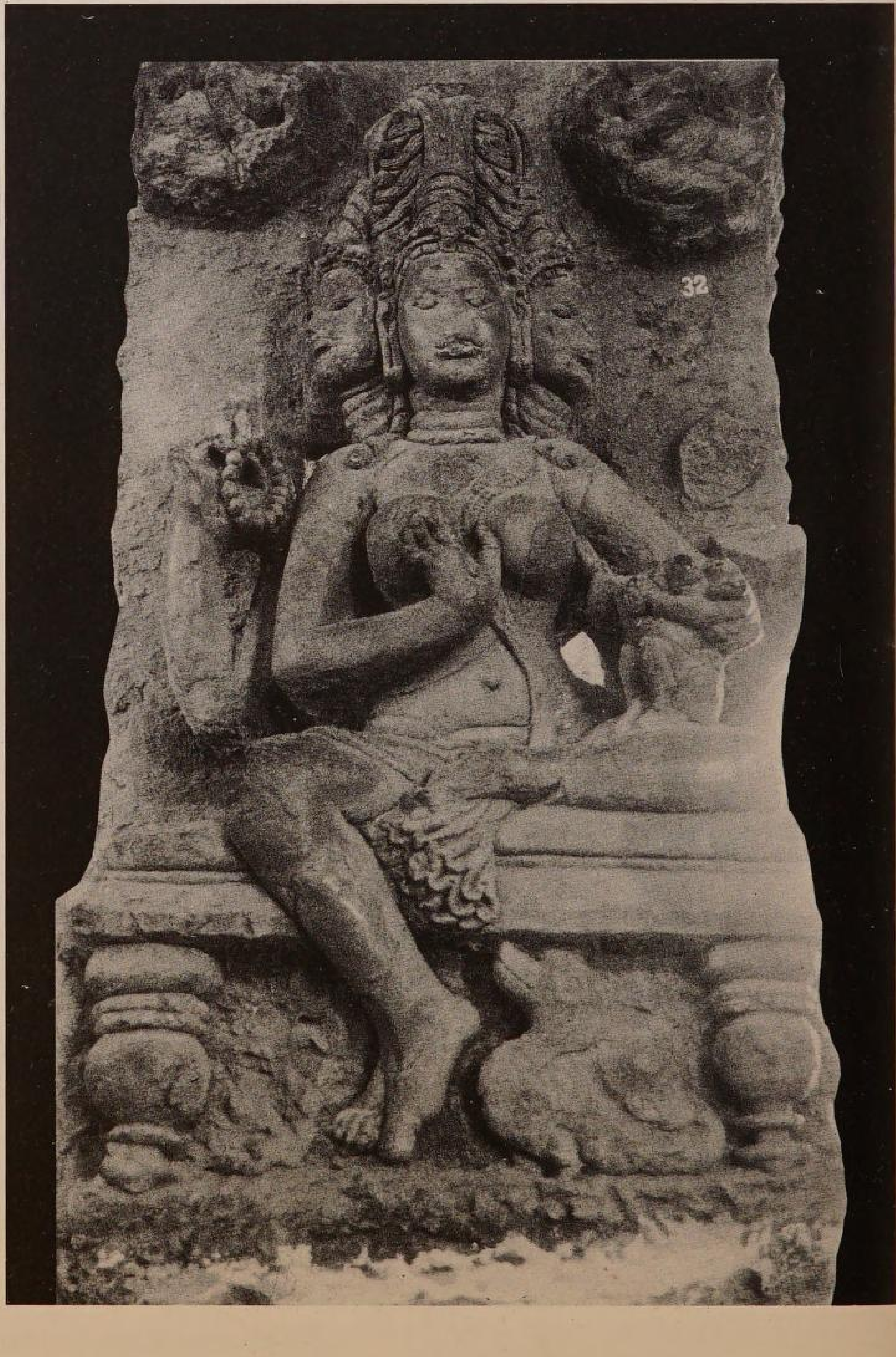


Fig. 12: Brāhmī; Khiching Museum, *c*. tenth century.

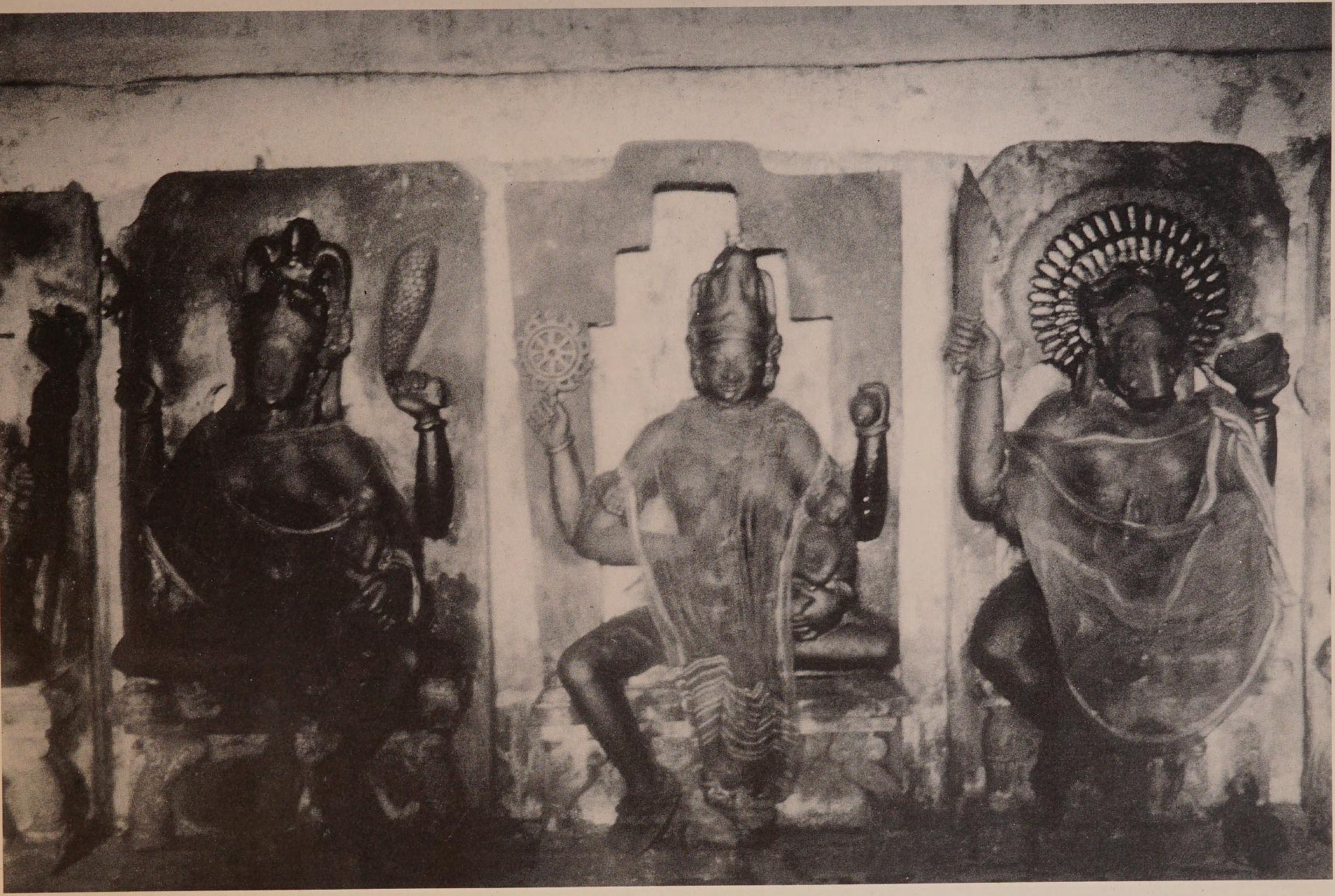


Fig. 13: Left to right: Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī; from the Saptamātṛkā set in the Mārkaṇḍeśvara temple compound, Puri, *c*. tenth century.

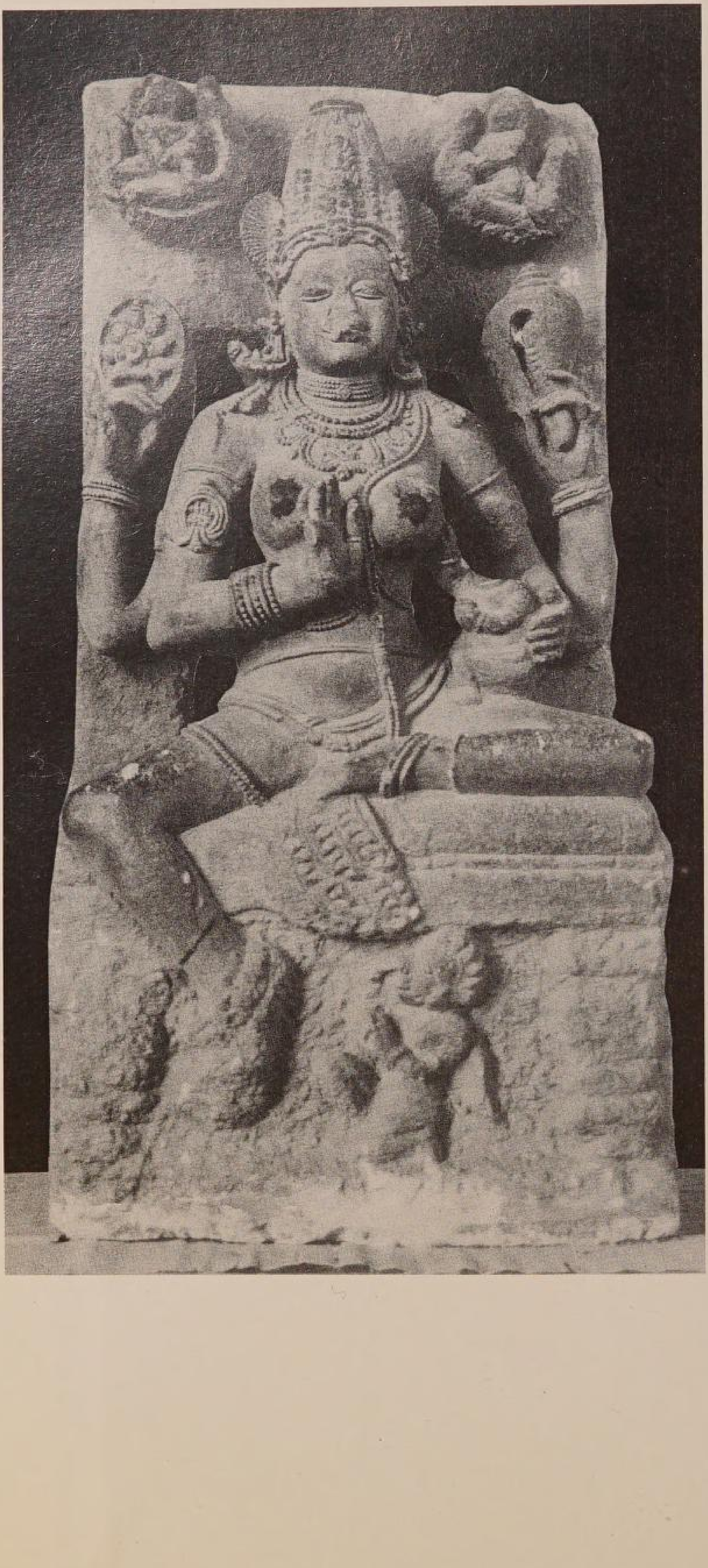


Fig. 14: Vaiṣṇavī; Khiching Museum,
c. tenth century.

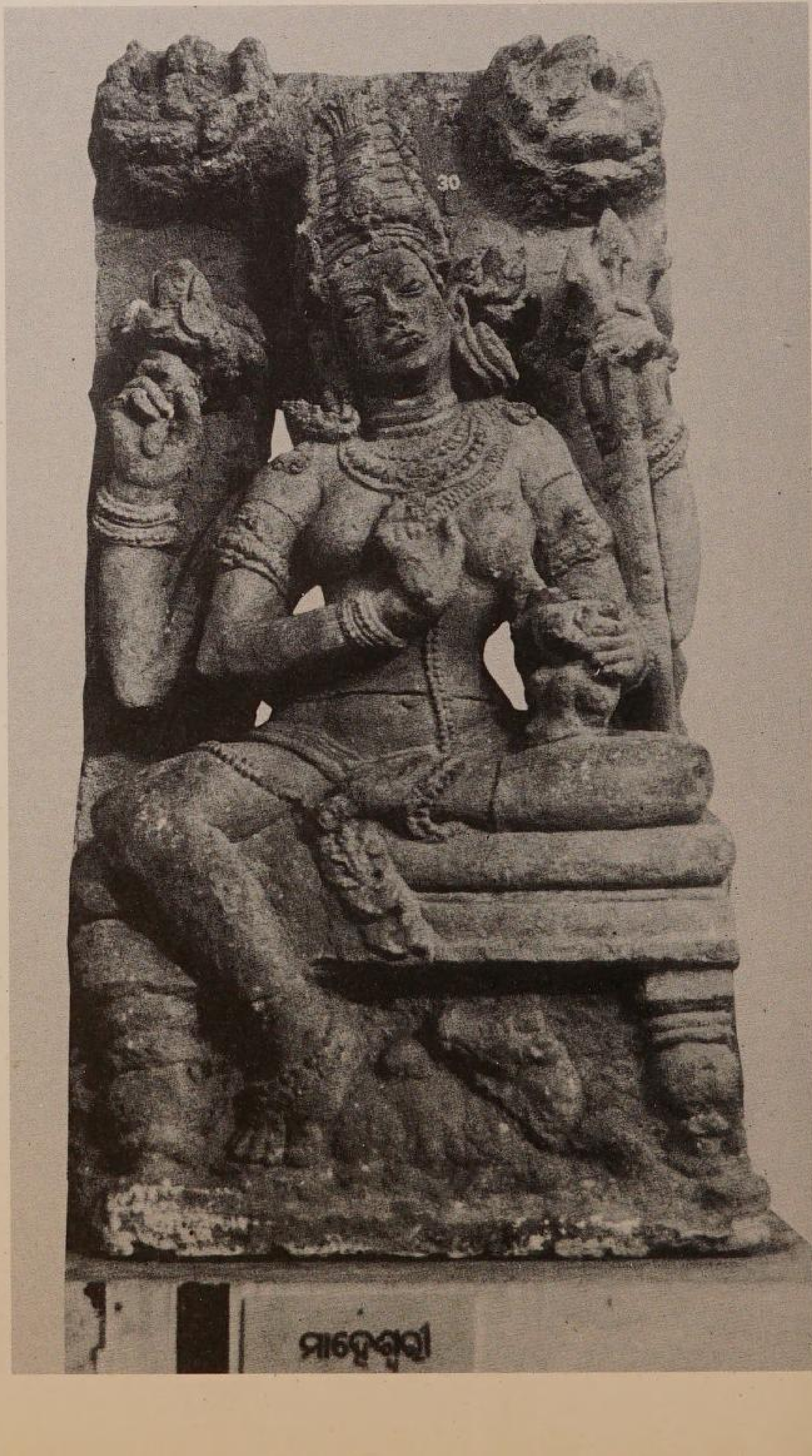


Fig. 15: Śivānī; Khiching Museum,
c. tenth century.

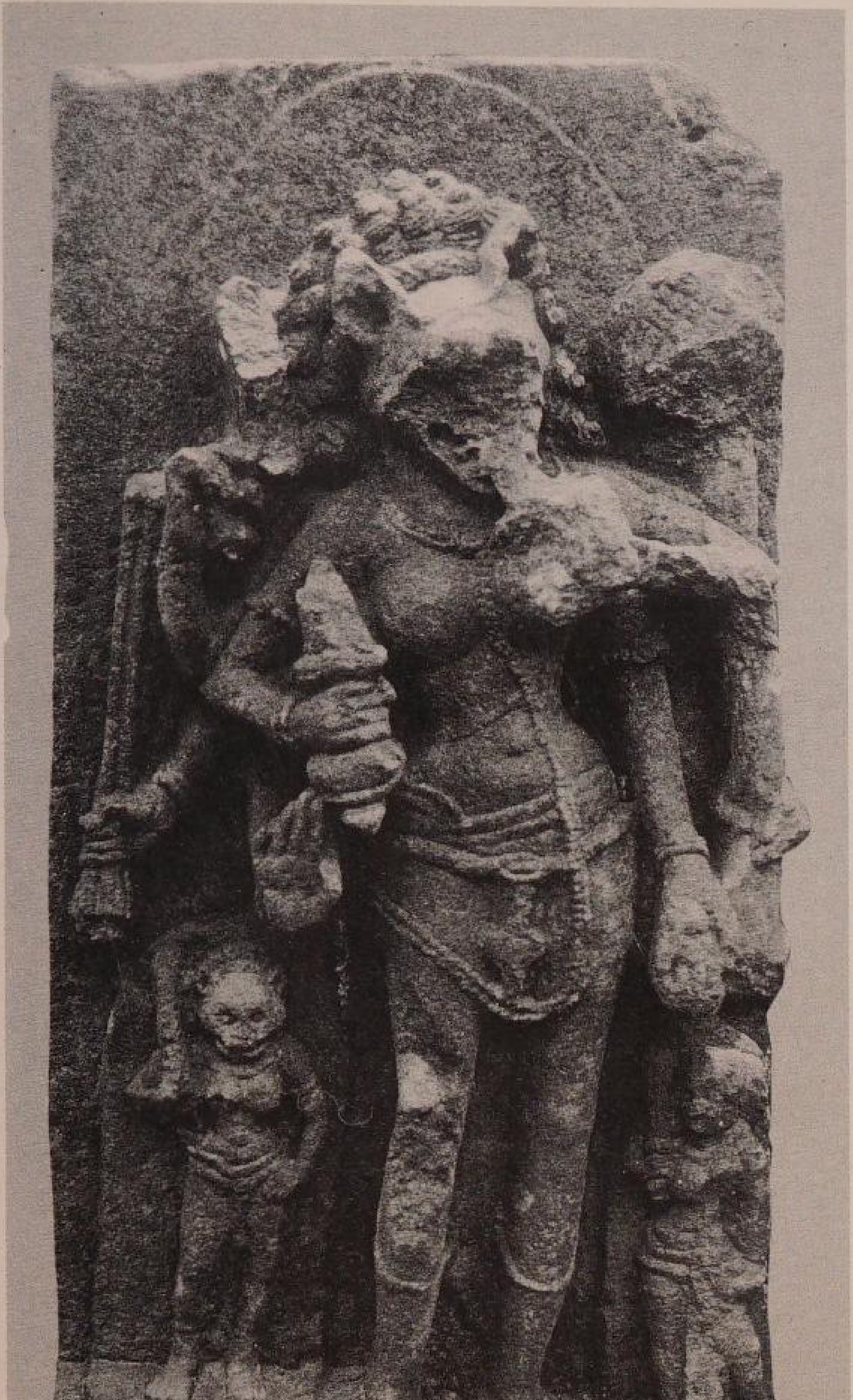


Fig. 16: Nṛsiṁhī; ruined Pāśa-Caṇḍī temple, Badasahi, tenth or eleventh century.

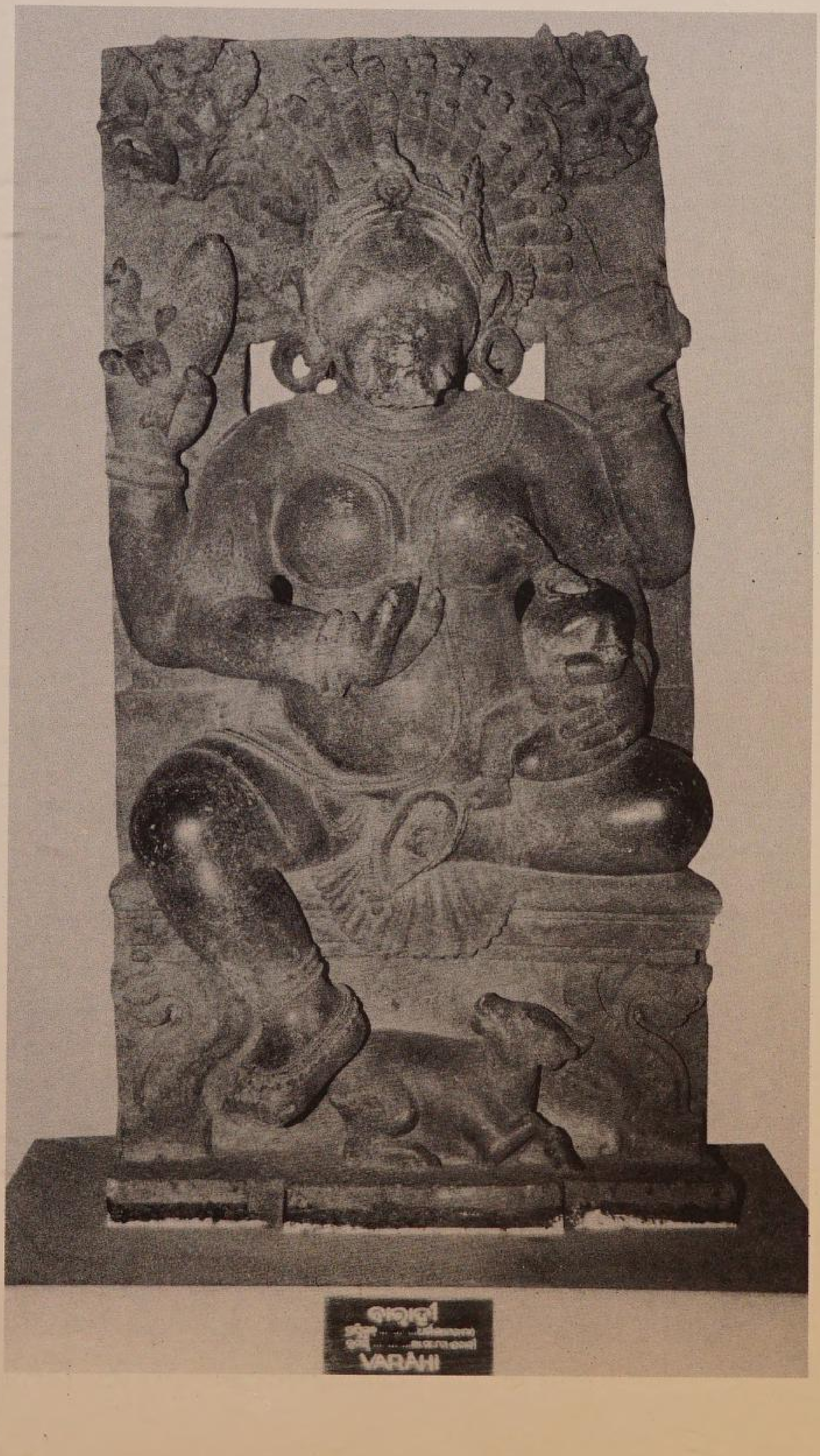


Fig. 17: Vārāhī; from Dharmasala, Bhubaneswar; datation uncertain.

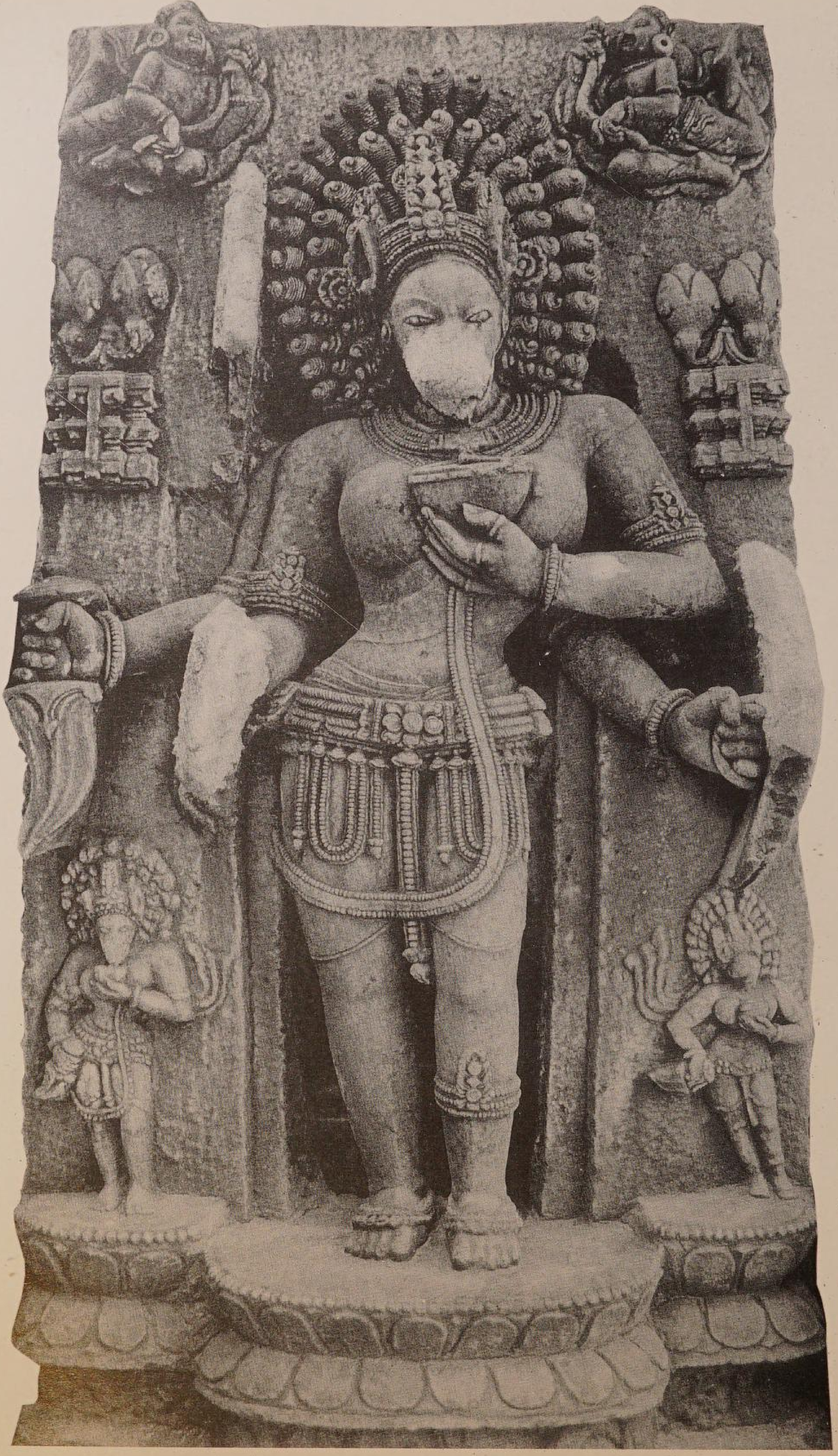


Fig. 18: Vārāhī; Gaṅgeśvarī temple, Beyalisbati, thirteenth century.

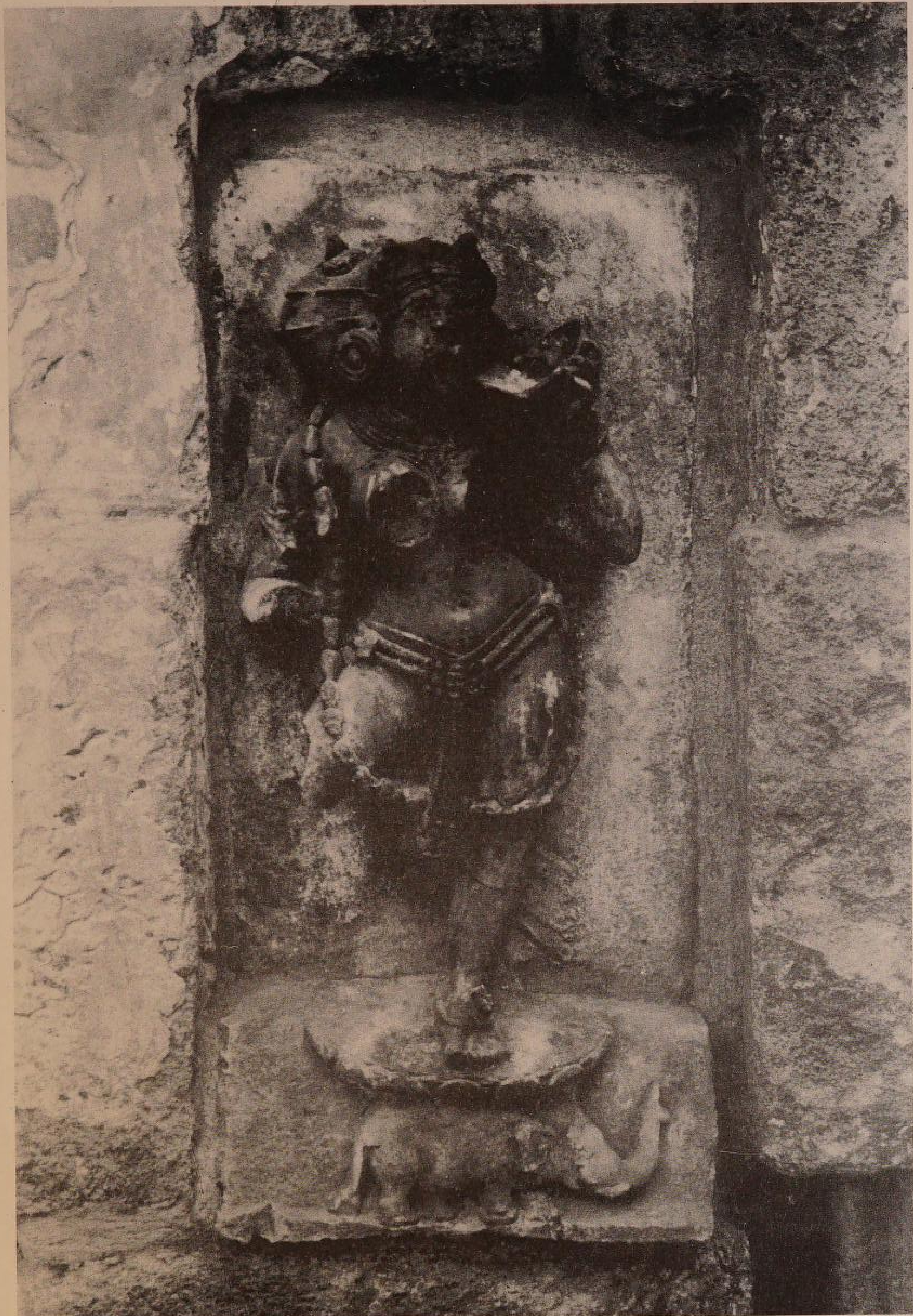


Fig. 19: *Yoginī* # 3 (unidentified); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

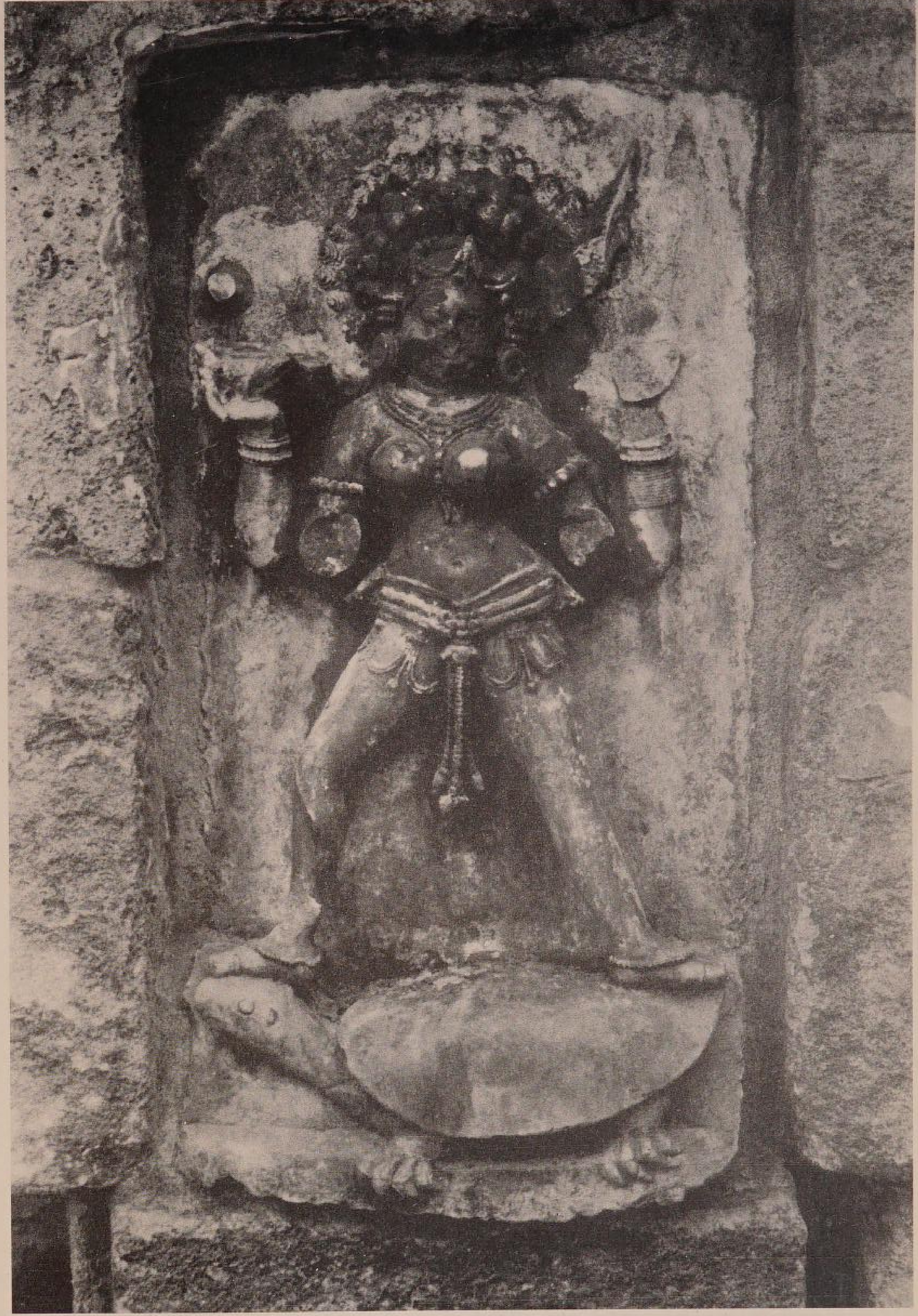


Fig. 20: *Yoginī* # 4 (Yamunā?); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

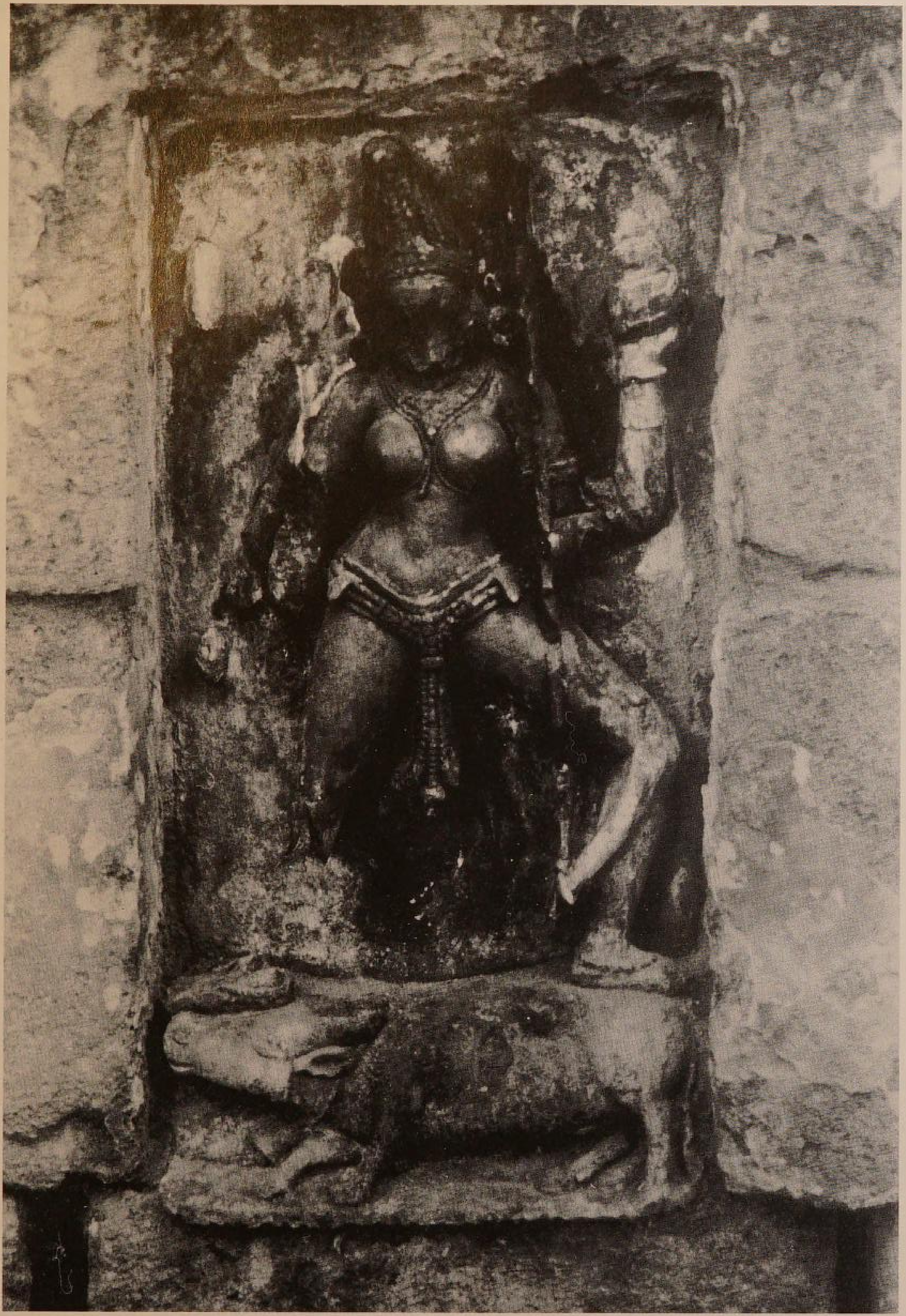


Fig. 21: *Yoginī* # 9 (Vārāhī?); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

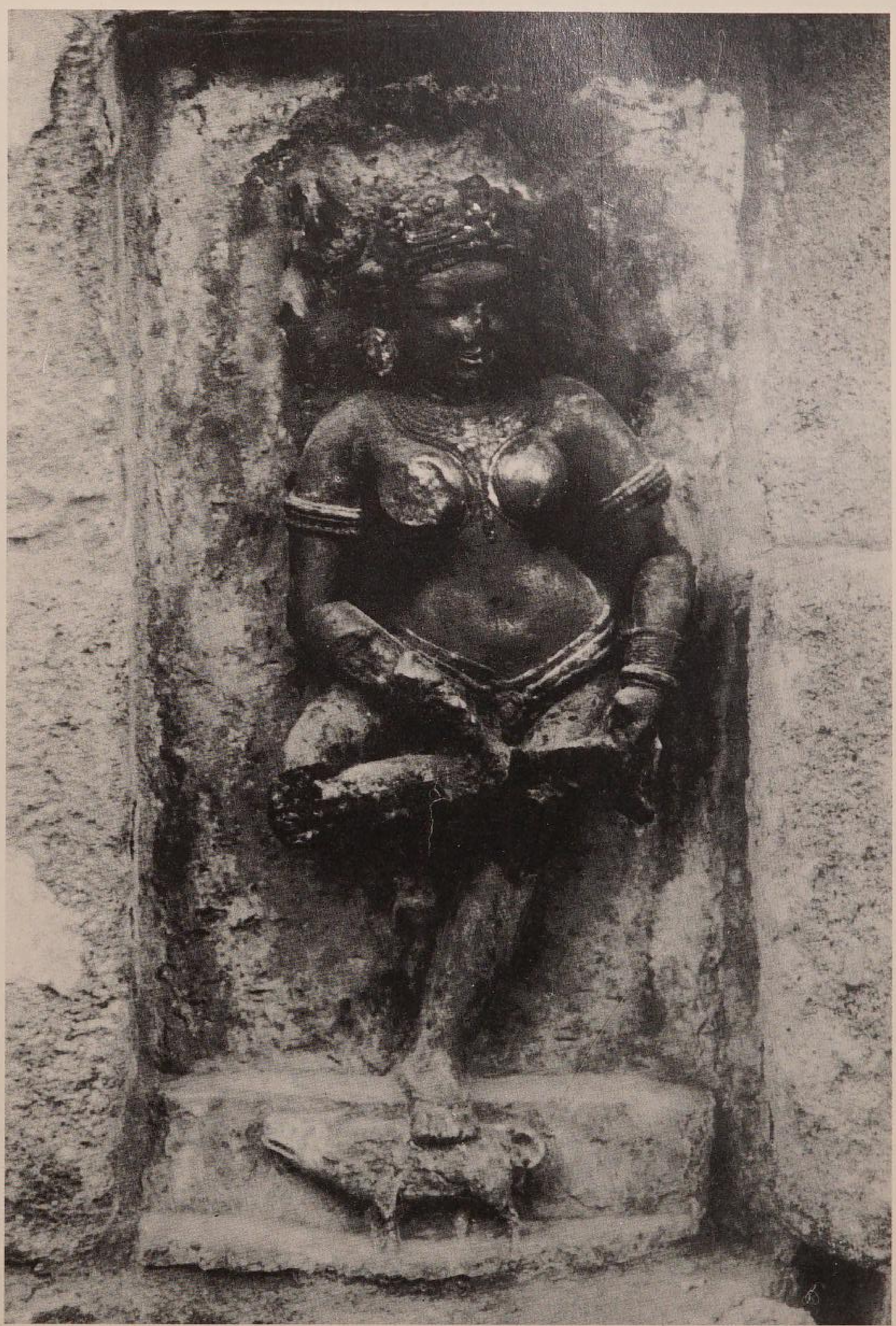


Fig. 22: *Yoginī* # 21 (Kararālī?); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

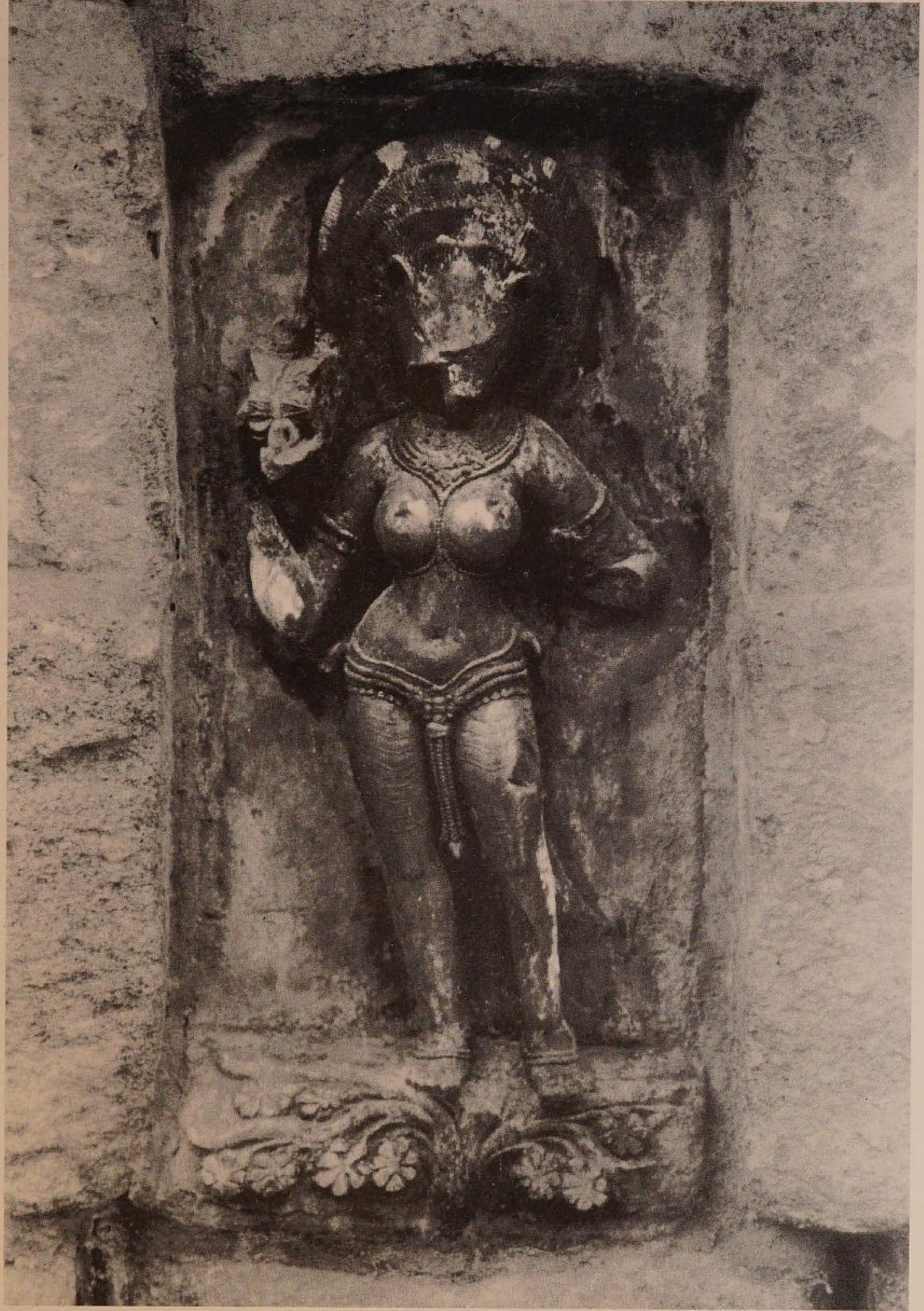


Fig. 23: *Yoginī* # 25 (Bhalukā?); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

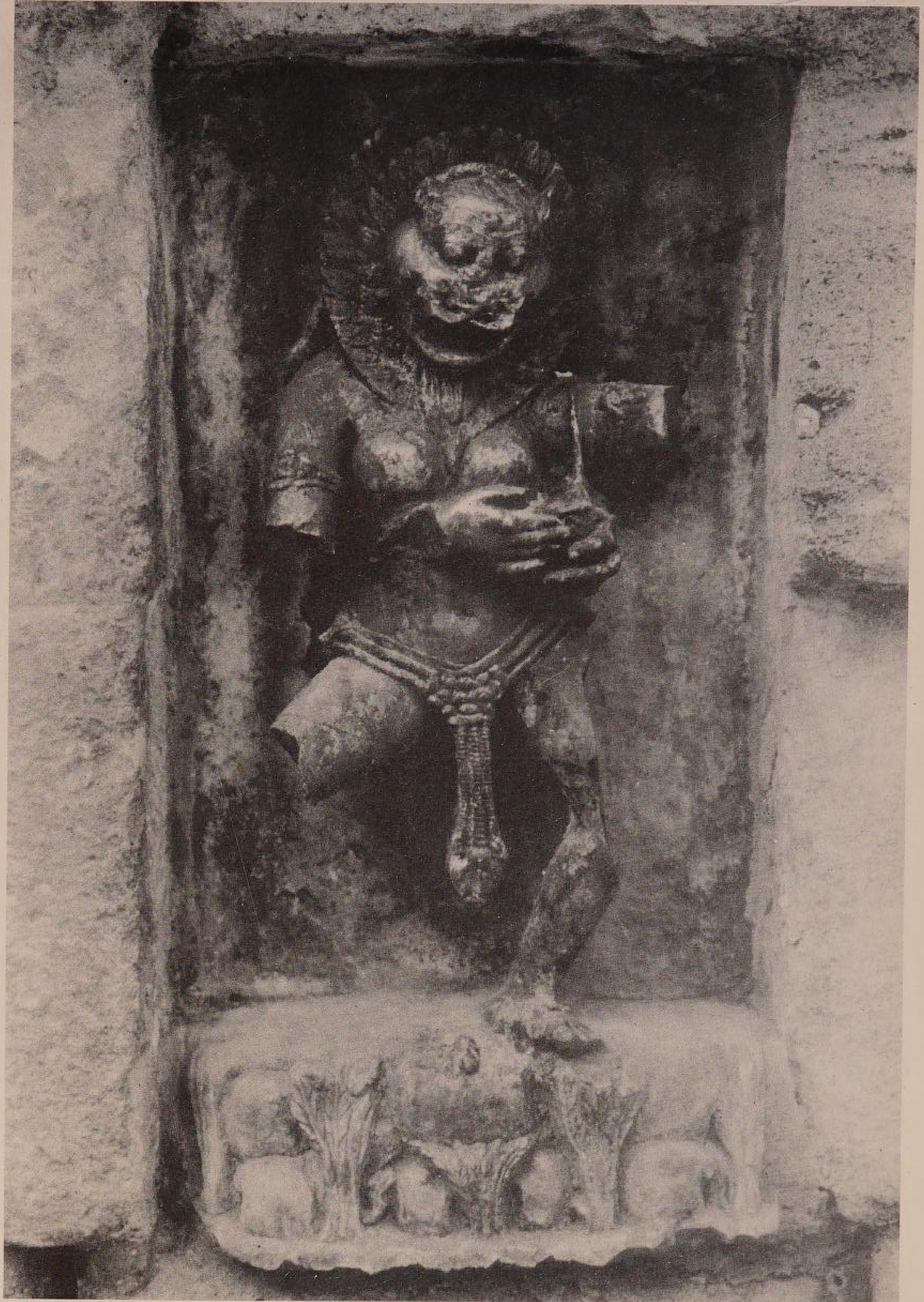


Fig. 24: *Yoginī* # 26 (Nr̥siṁhī?); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

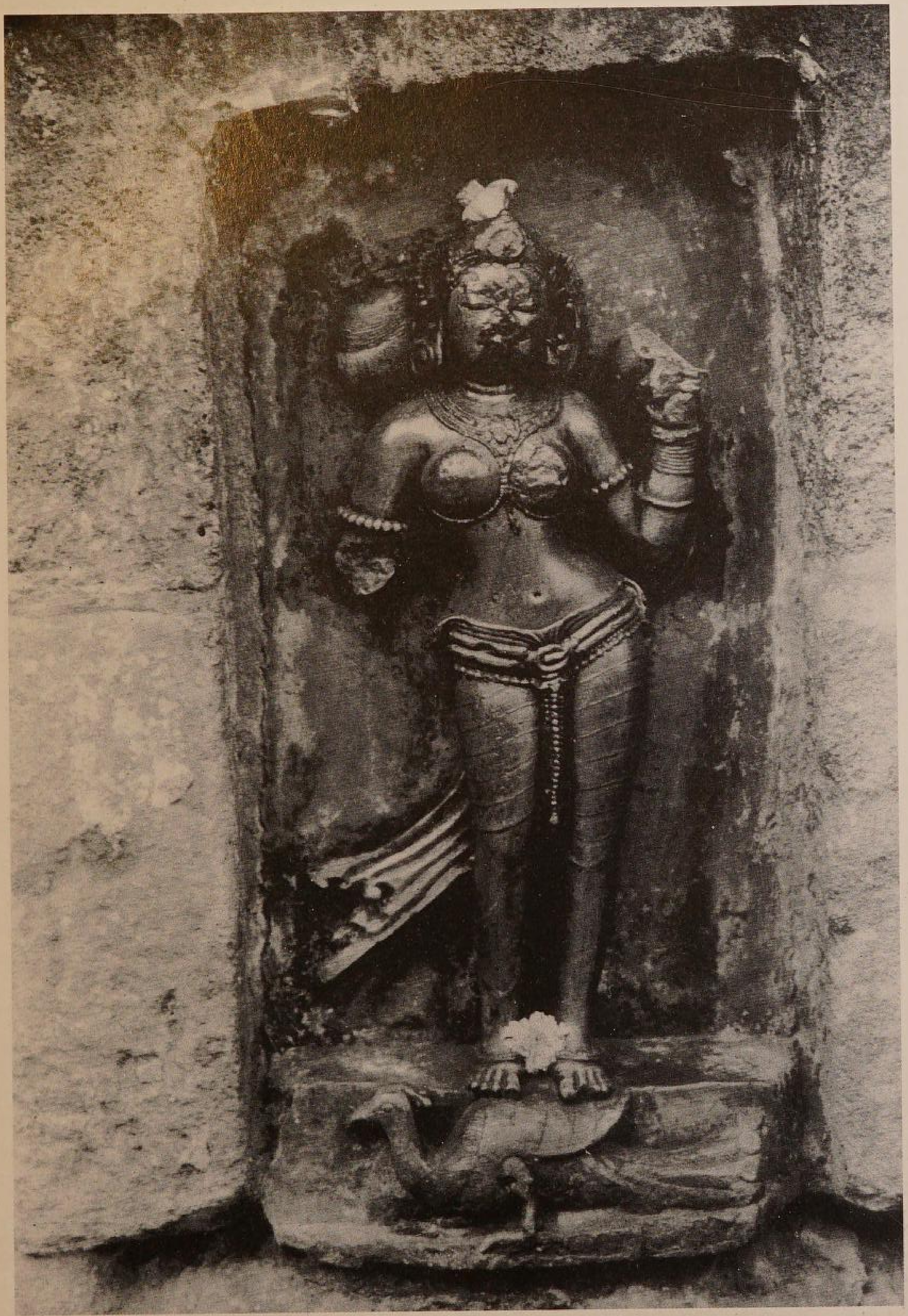


Fig. 25: *Yoginī* # 30 (Kaumārī?); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

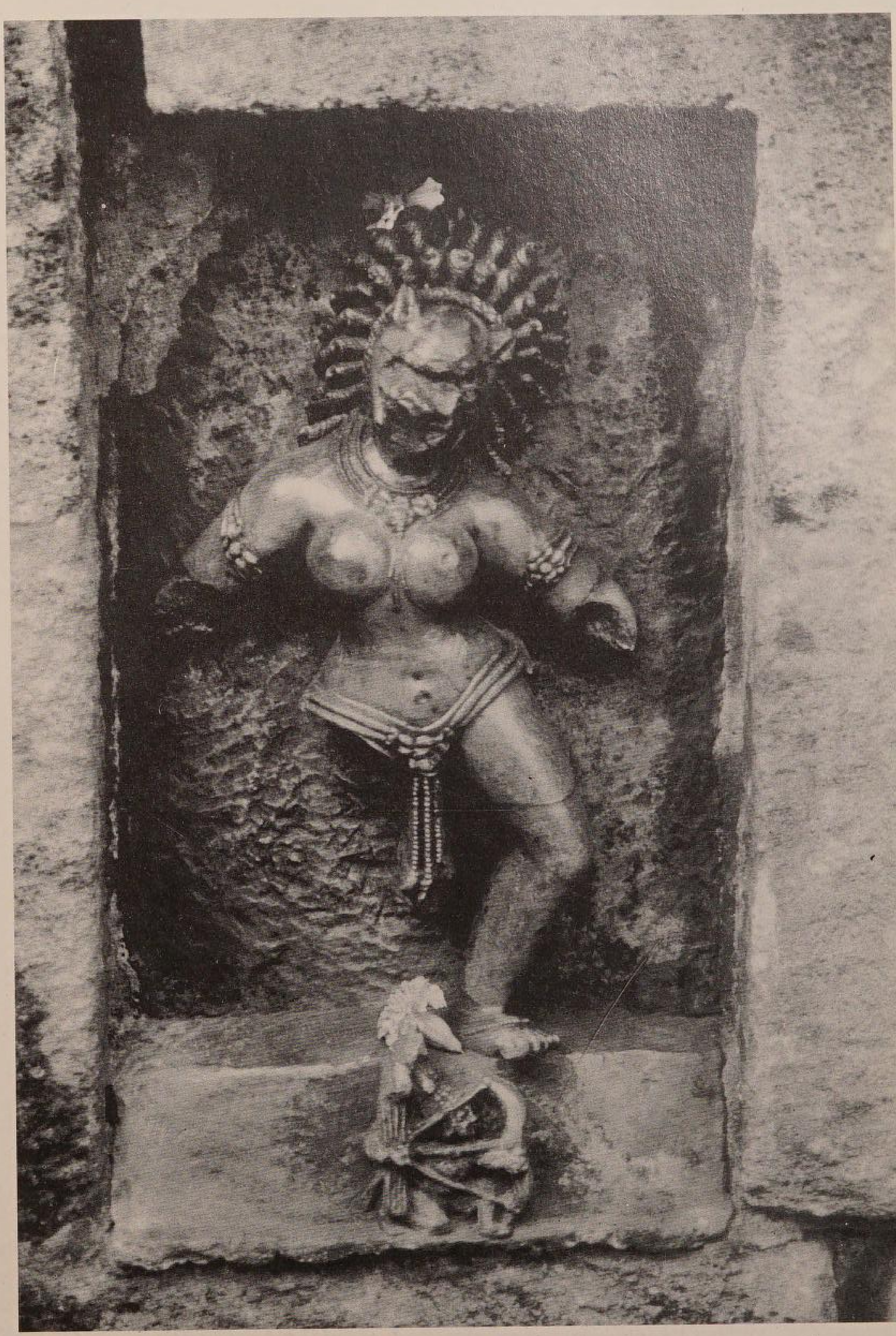


Fig. 26: *Yoginī* # 32 (unidentified); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

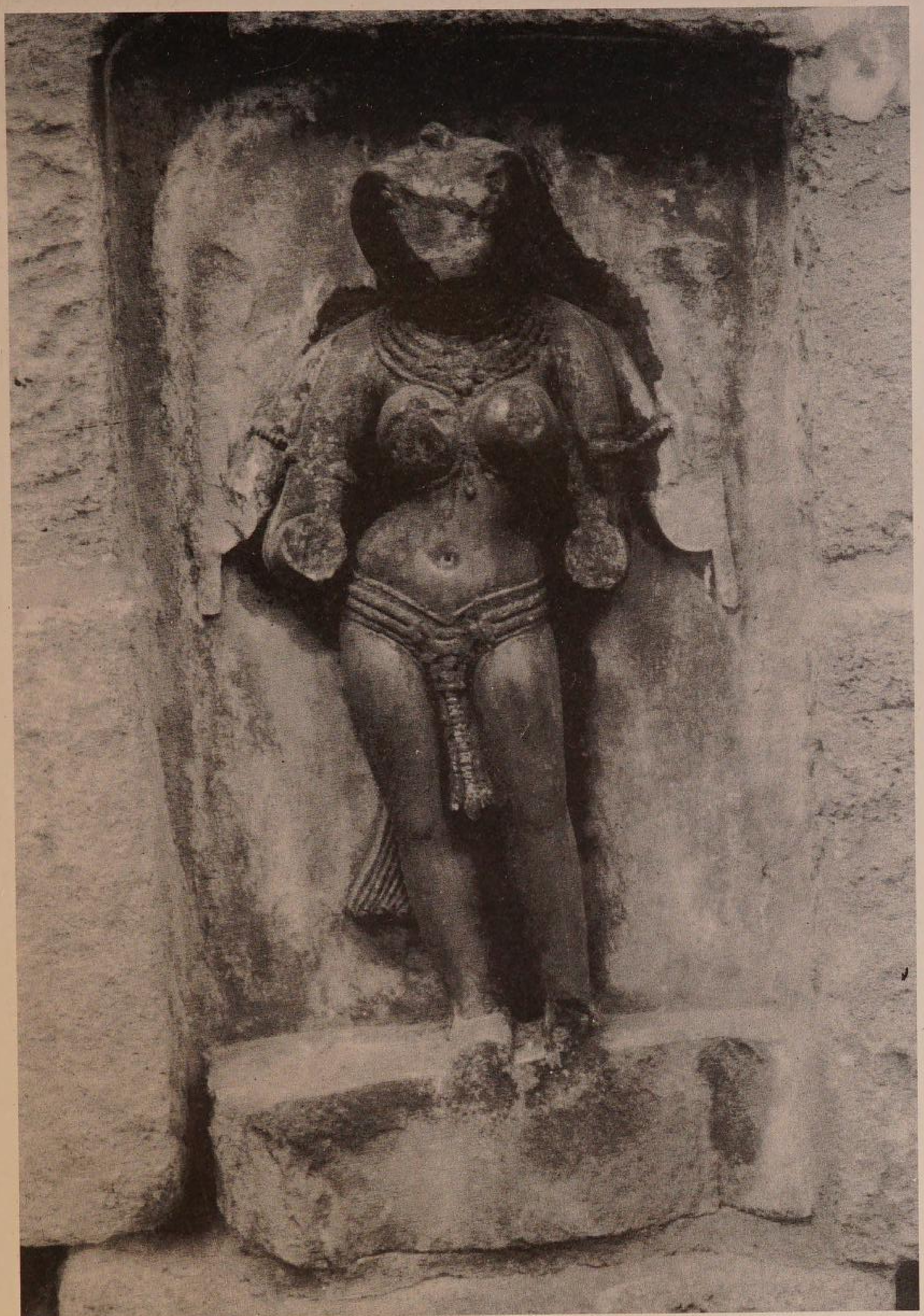


Fig. 27: *Yoginī* # 34 (unidentified); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

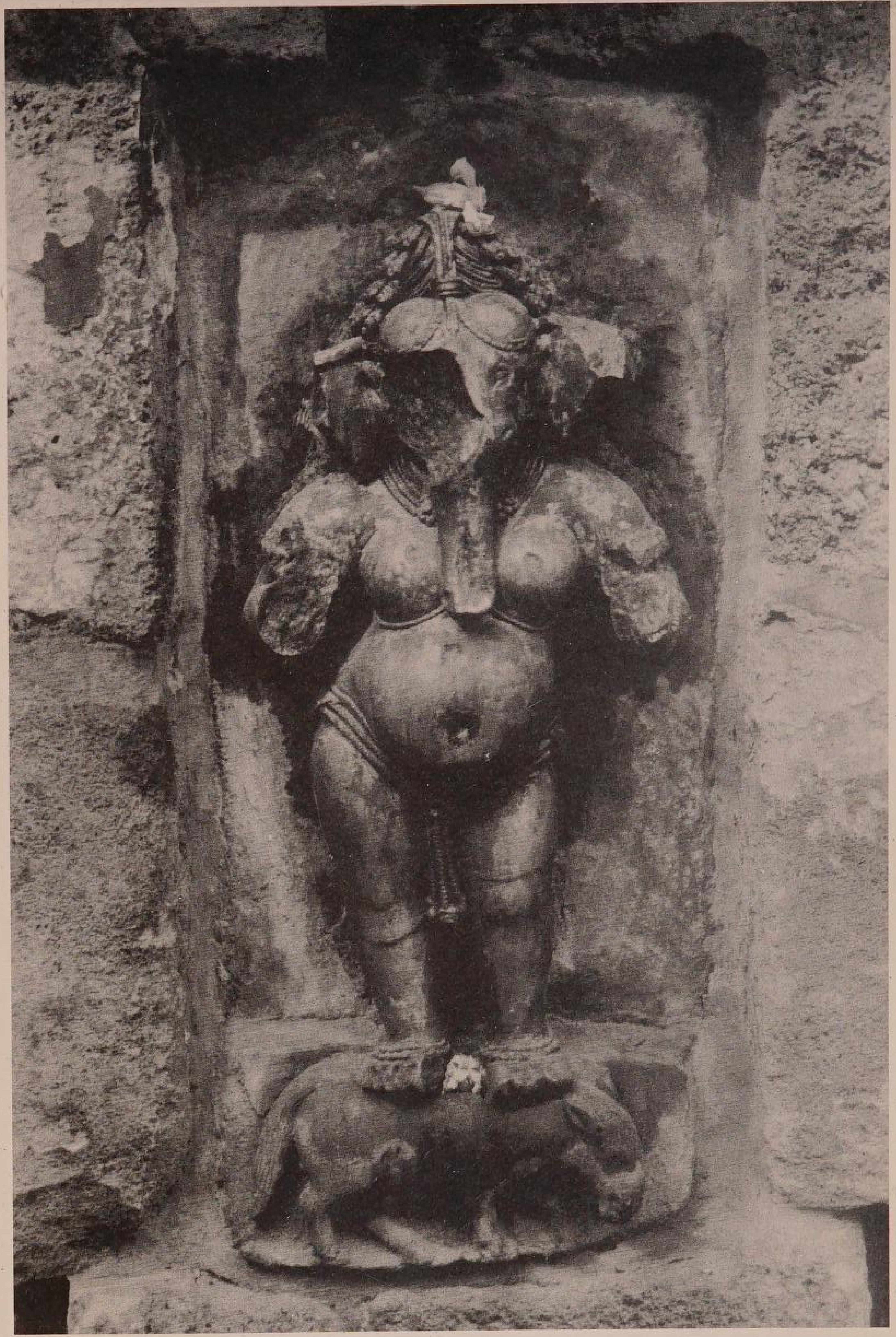


Fig. 28: *Yoginī* # 38 (Mātaṅgī, Hastimukhā, Śītalā?); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

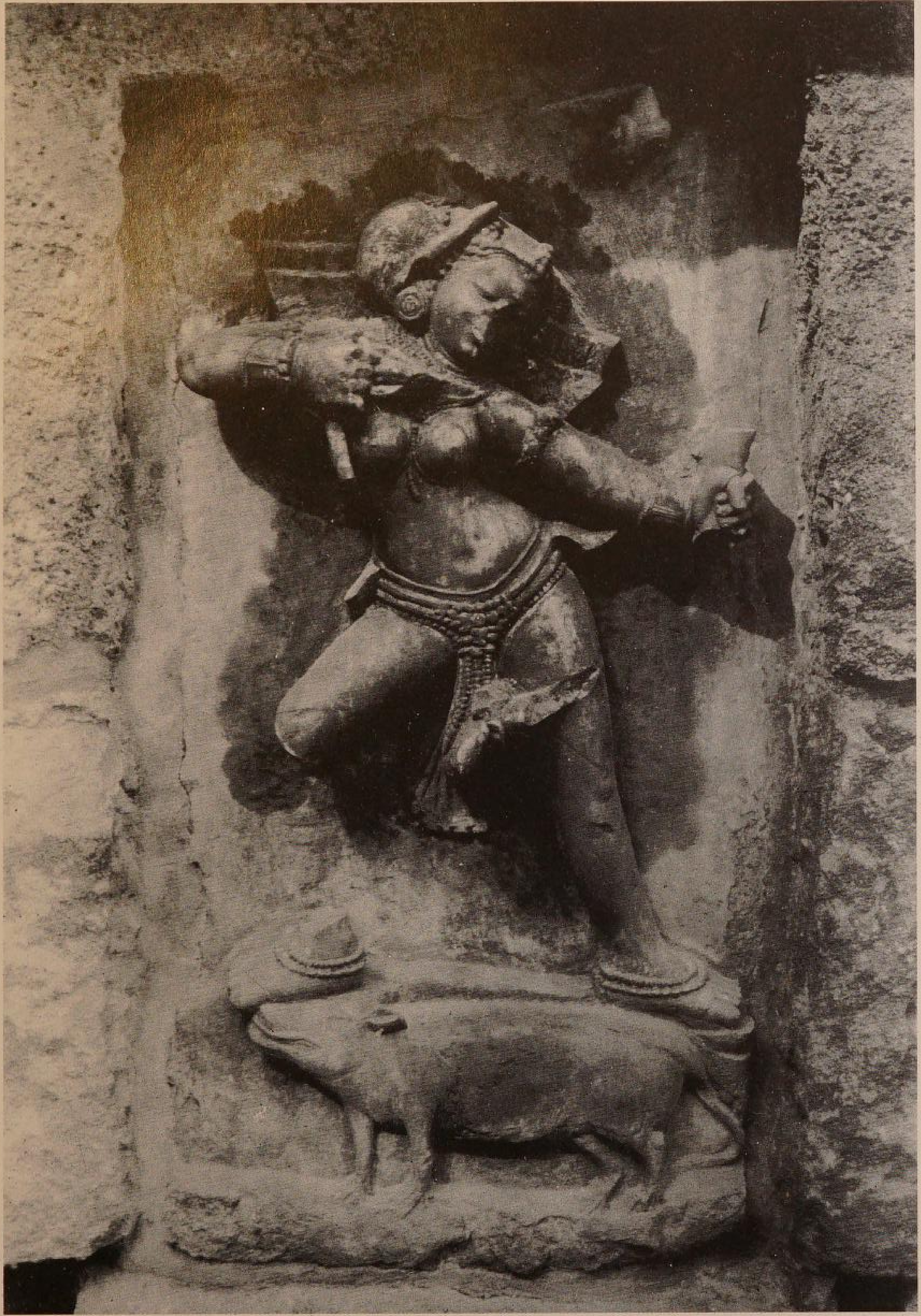


Fig. 29: *Yoginī* # 39 (unidentified); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

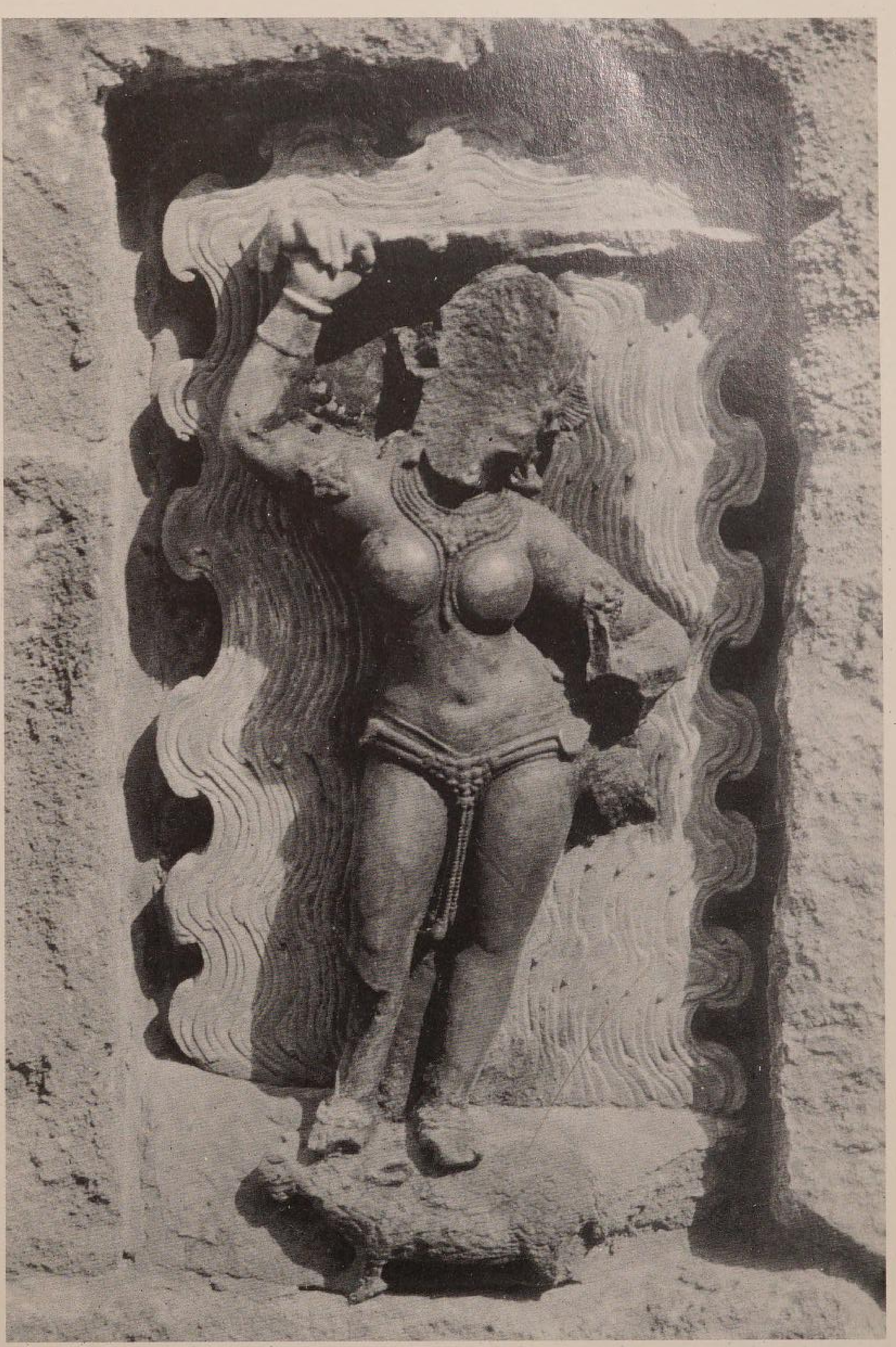
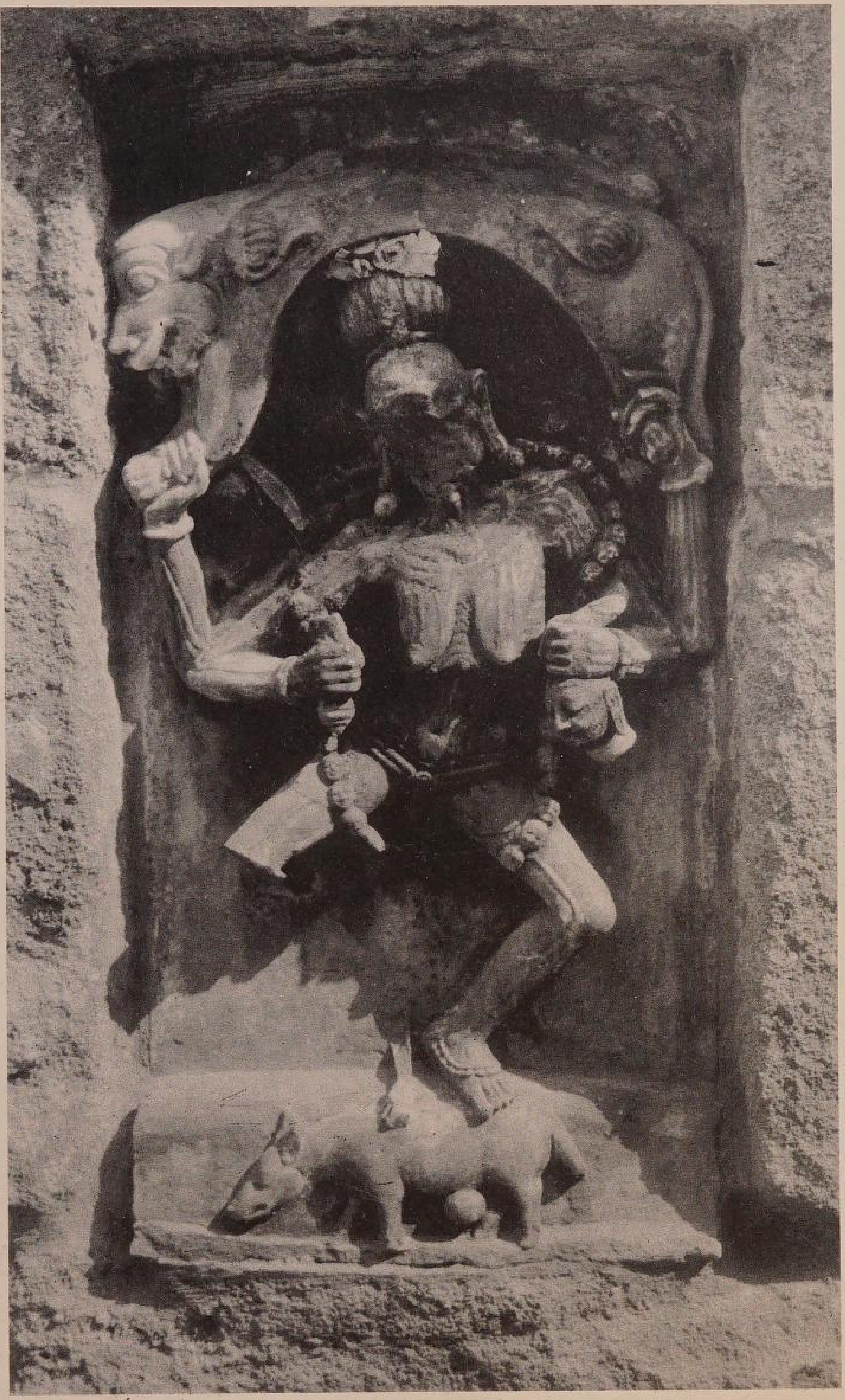


Fig. 30: *Yoginī* # 52 (Āgneyī?); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.

Fig. 31: *Yoginī* # 56 (resembling Cāmuṇḍā); Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur, *c*. ninth century.



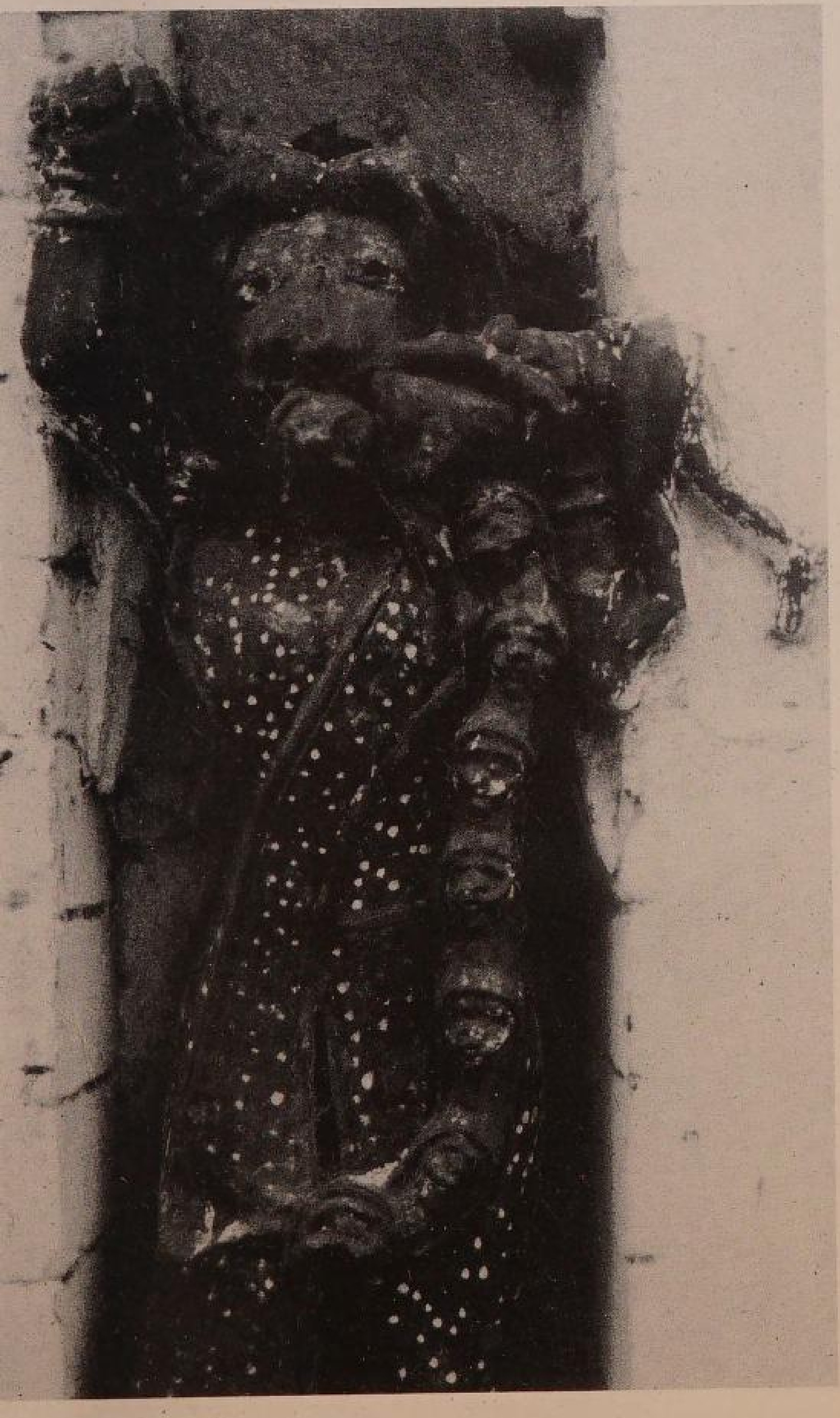
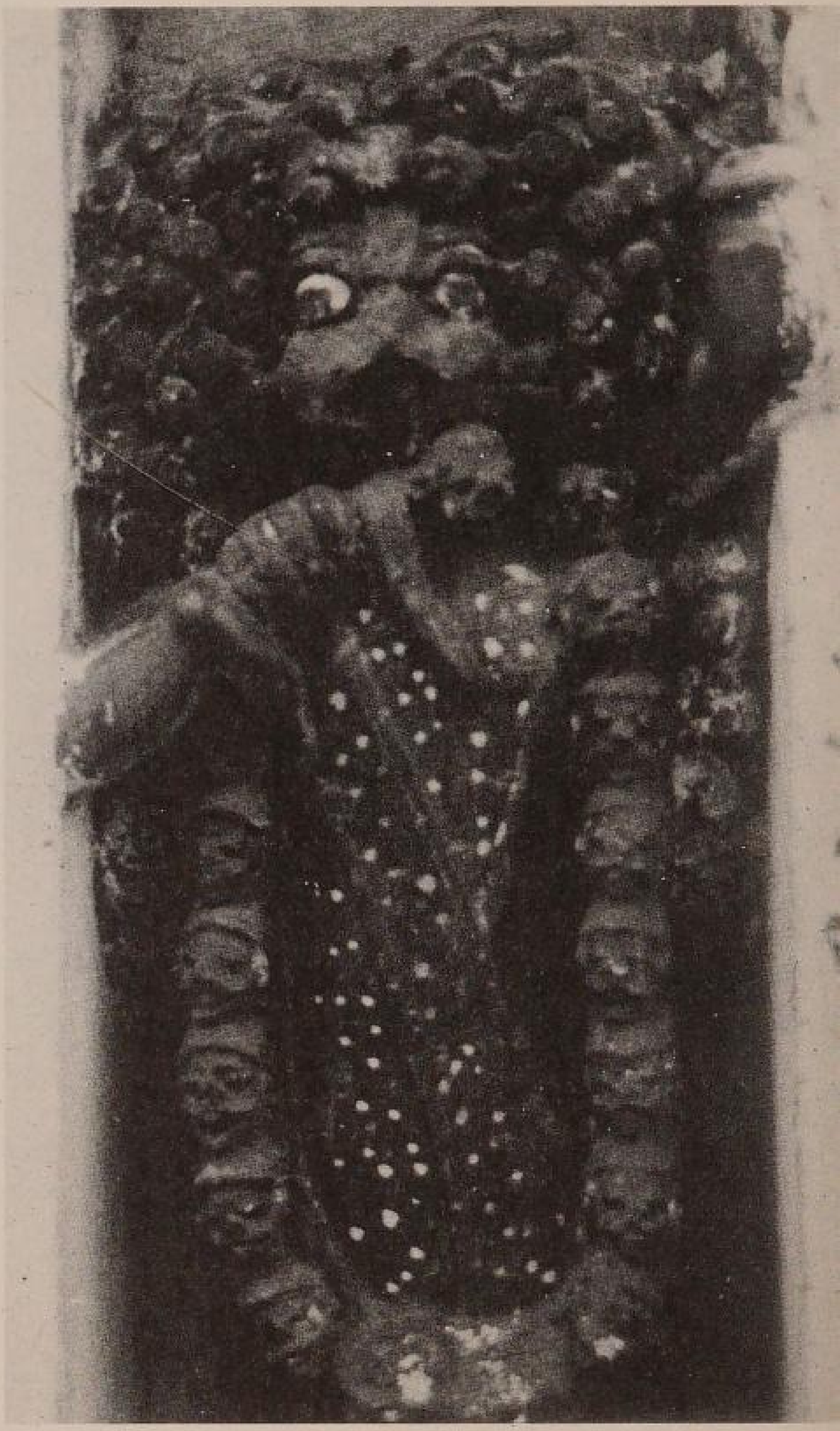


Fig. 32: *Yoginī* image serving as the door-keeper; Khambheśvarī temple, Sonepur; contemporary.

Fig. 33: *Yoginī* image serving as the door-keeper; Khambheśvarī temple, Sonepur; contemporary.



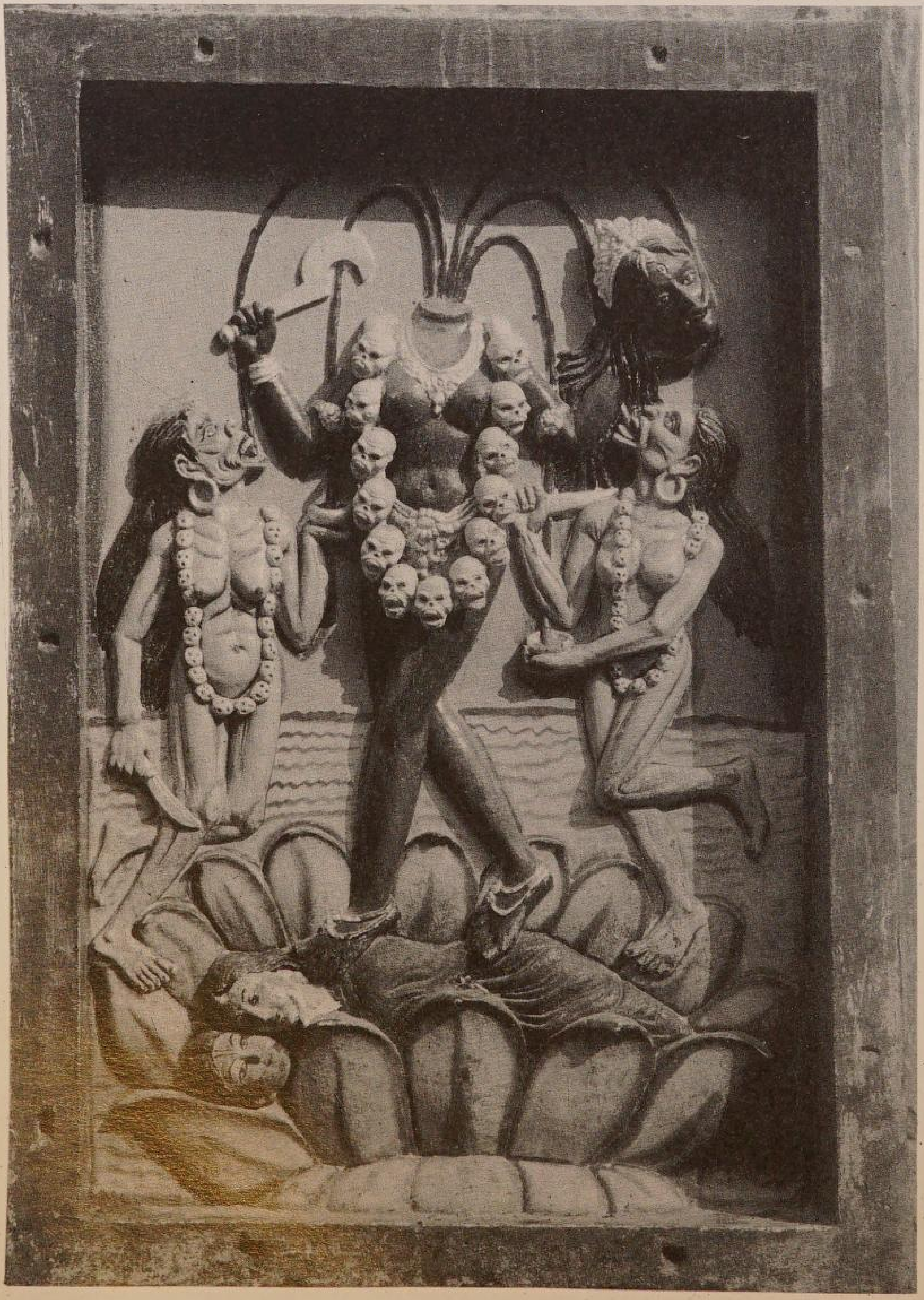
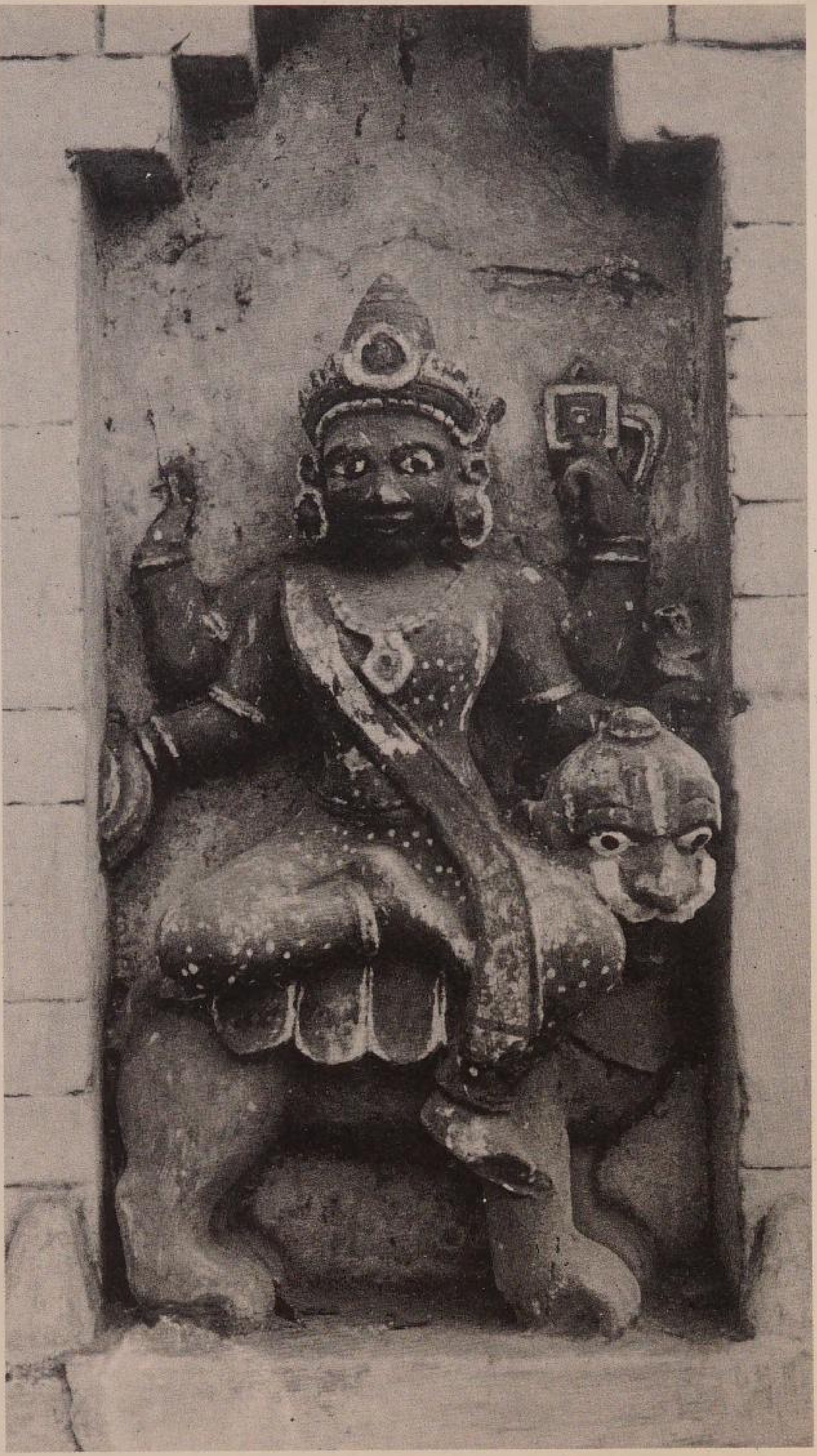


Fig. 34: Mahāvidyā Chinnamastā; Buḍhī Ṭhākurāṇī temple, Berhampur; contemporary.

Fig. 35: Mahāvidyā Bhuvaneśvarī; Khambheśvarī temple, Sonepur; contemporary.



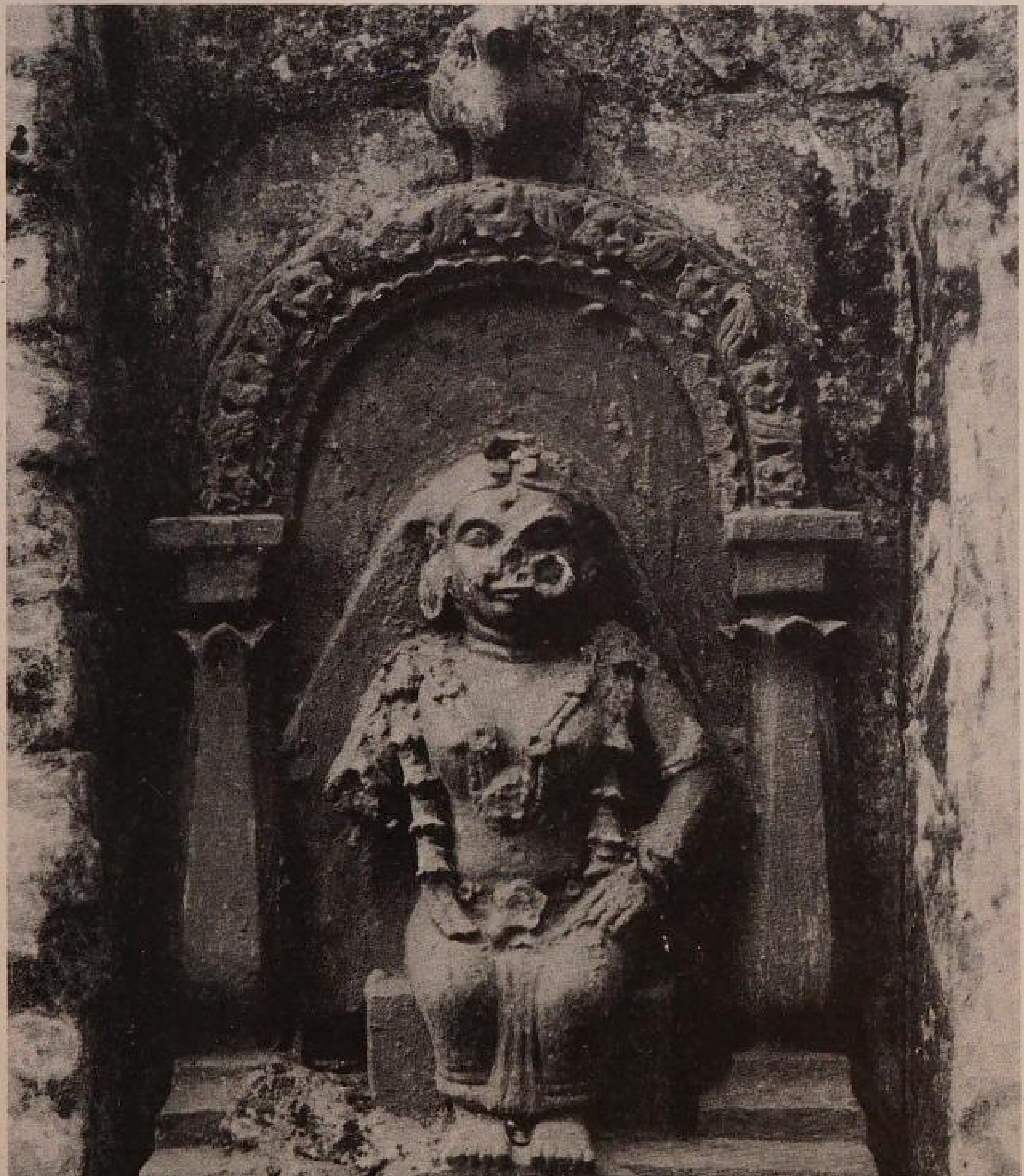


Fig. 36: Mahāvidyā Dhūmāvatī; Khambheśvarī temple, Sonepur; contemporary.

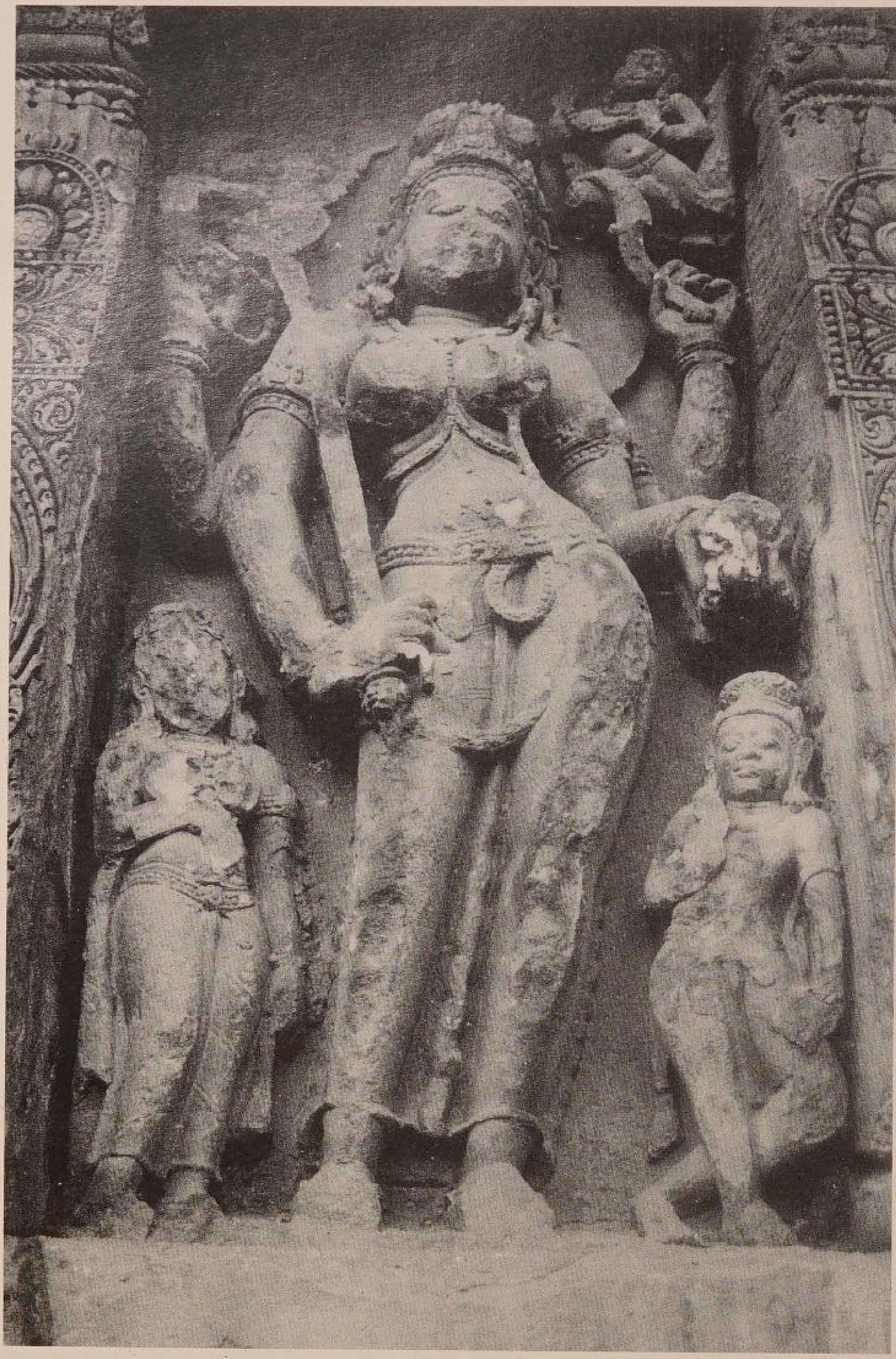


Fig. 37: Pārvatī; Vaitāl Deul, Bhubaneswar, eighth century.

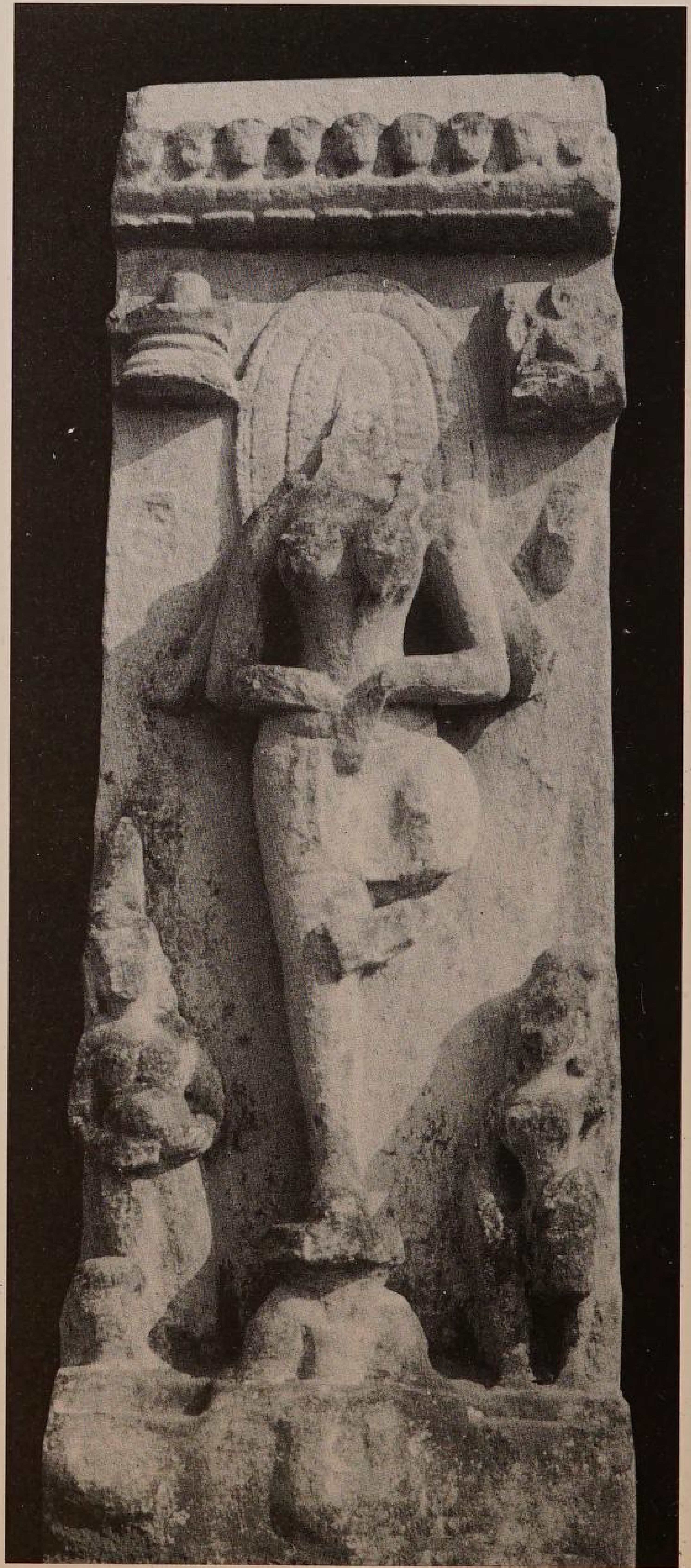


Fig. 38: Loose image of Tapasvinī Pārvatī; Someśvara temple compound, Patnagarh, *c*. tenth century.

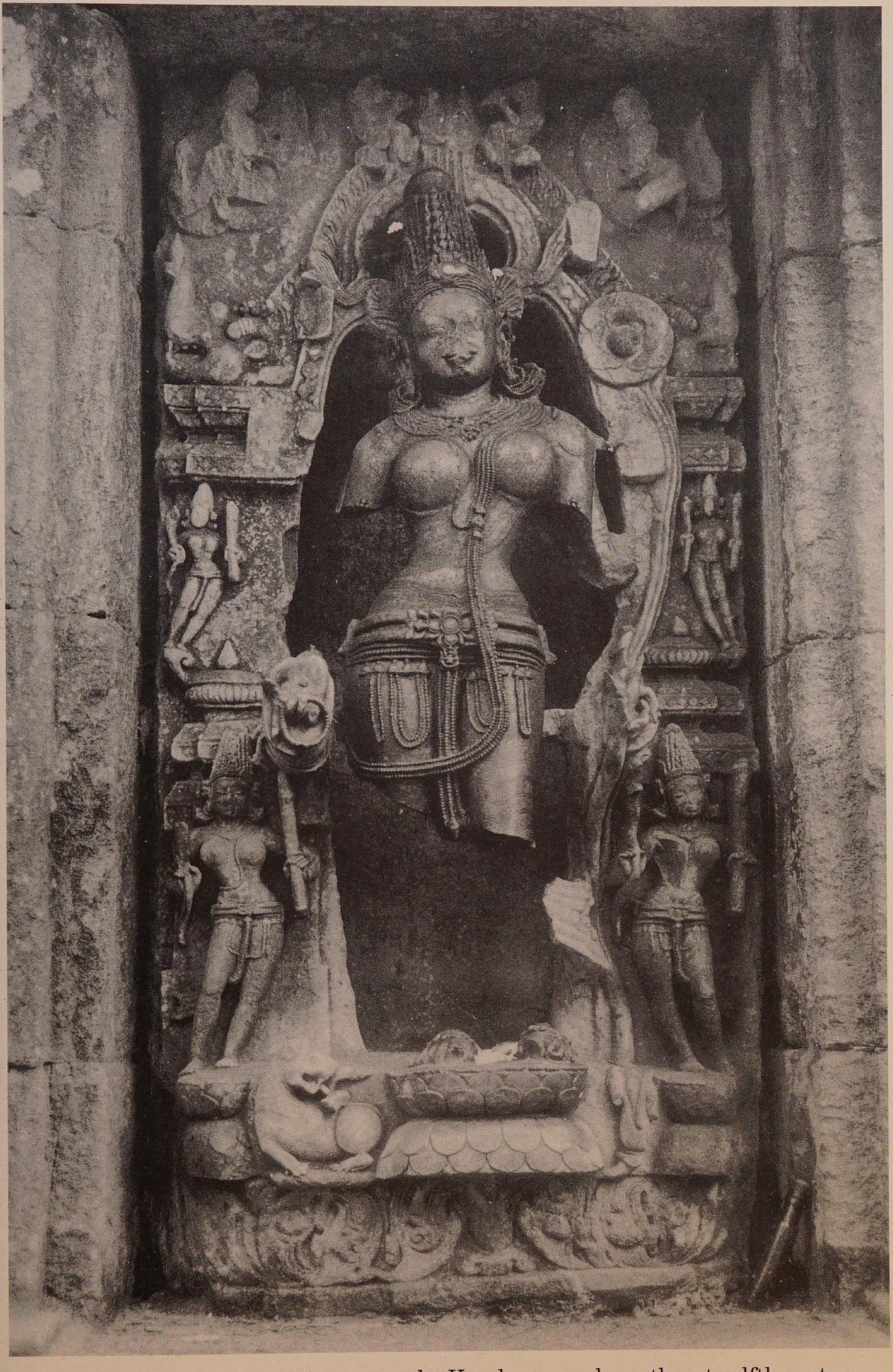


Fig. 39: Pārvatī; Trilocaneśvara temple, Kundesvara, eleventh or twelfth century.

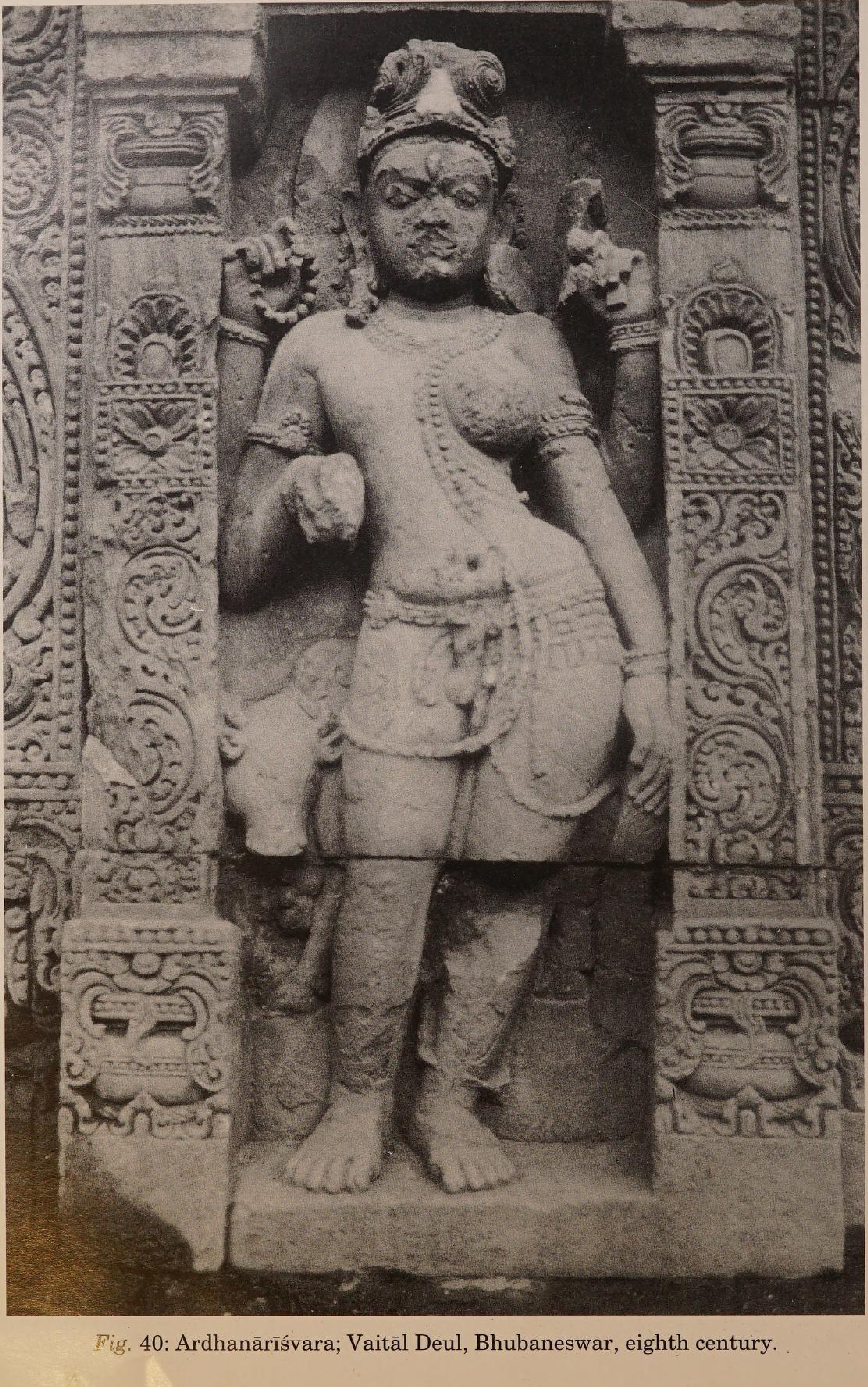


Fig. 40: Ardhanārīśvara; Vaitāl Deul, Bhubaneswar, eighth century.

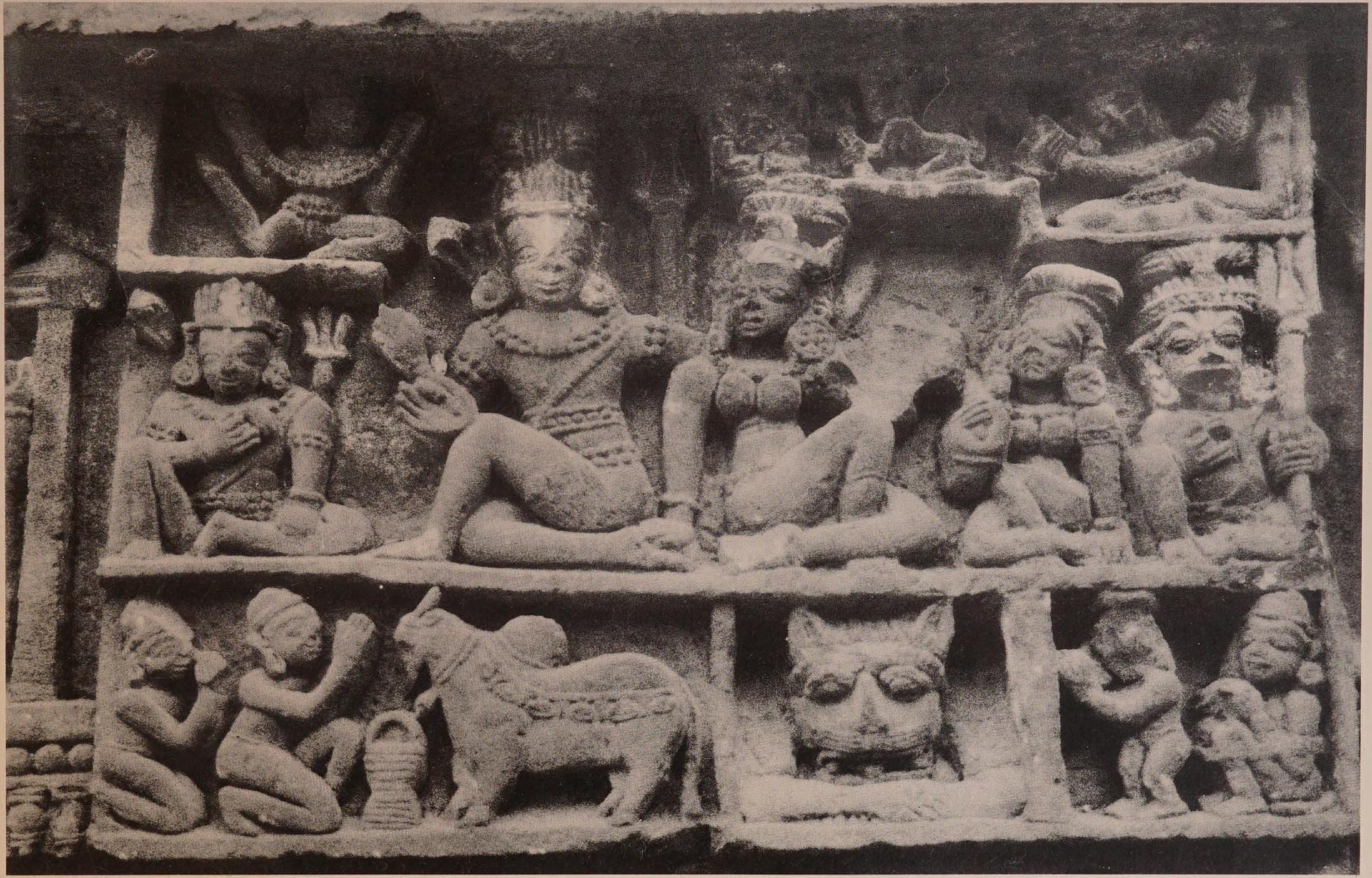


Fig. 41: Umāmaheśvaramūrti; Śatrughneśvara temple group, Bhubaneswar, late sixth century.

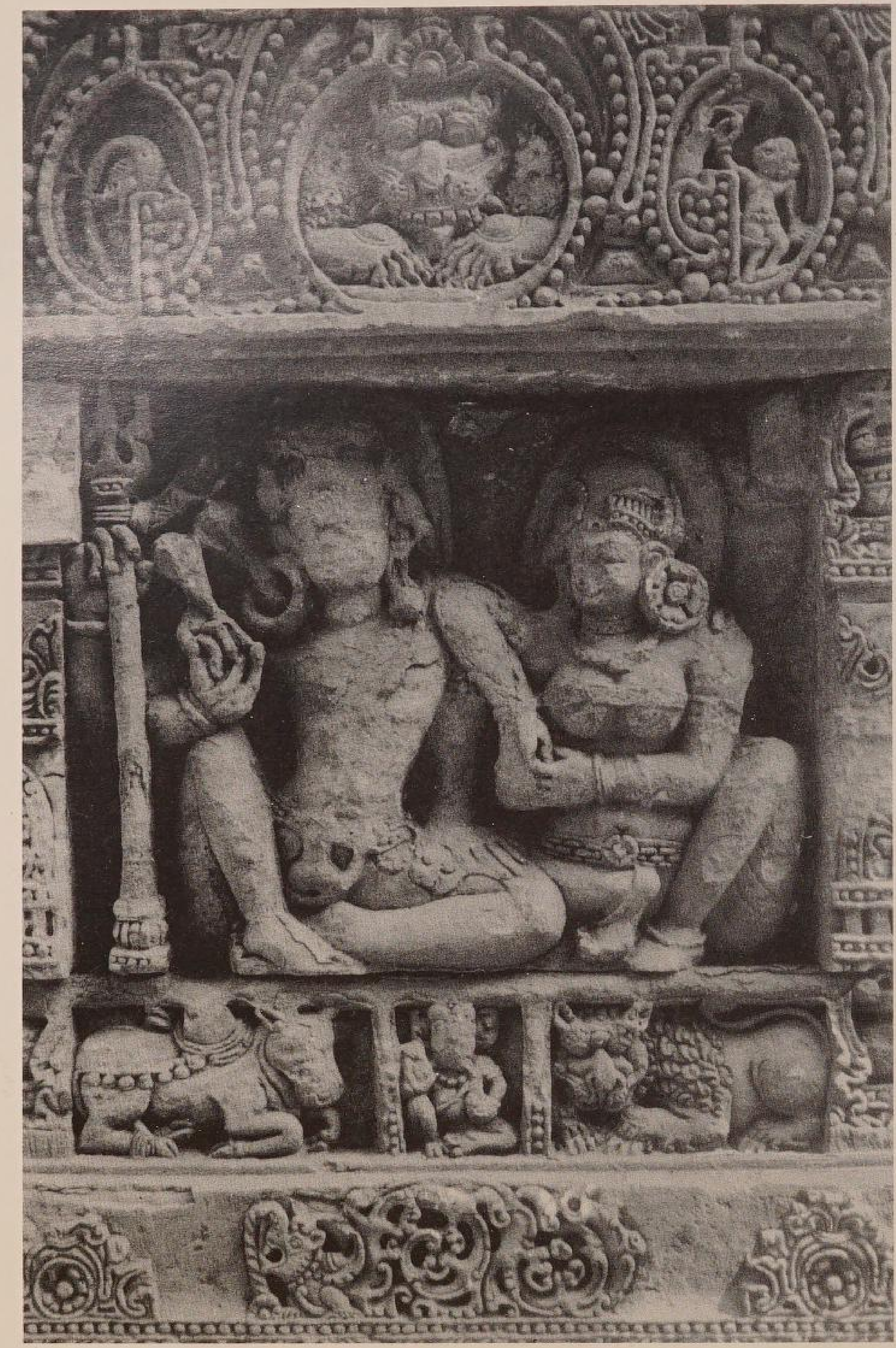


Fig. 42: Umāmaheśvaramūrti; Paraśurāmeśvara temple, Bhubaneswar, seventh century.

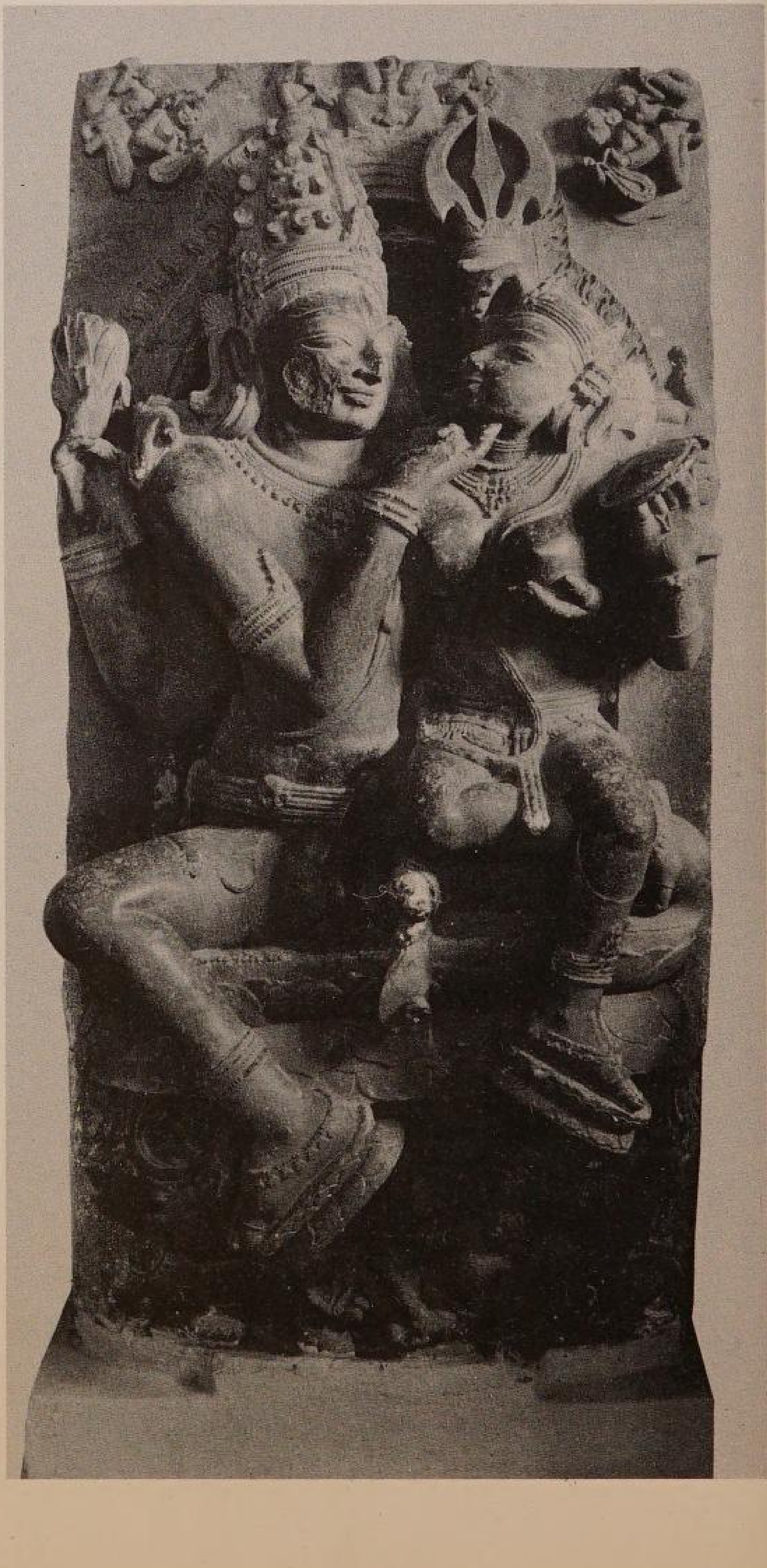


Fig. 43: Umāmaheśvaramūrti; Kiching Museum, *c*. tenth century.

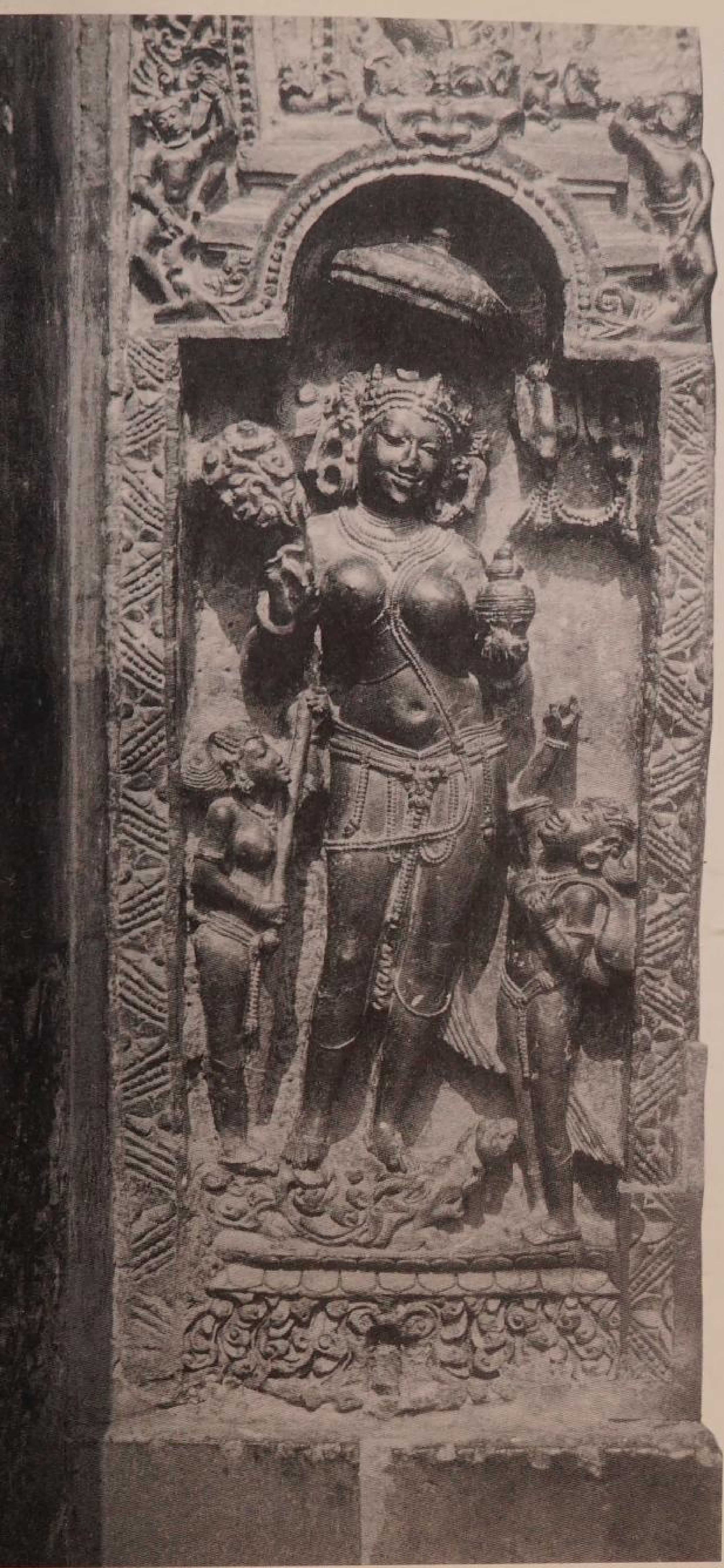


Fig. 44: Gaṅgā; reconstructed Kīcakeśvarī temple, Khiching, *c*. tenth century.

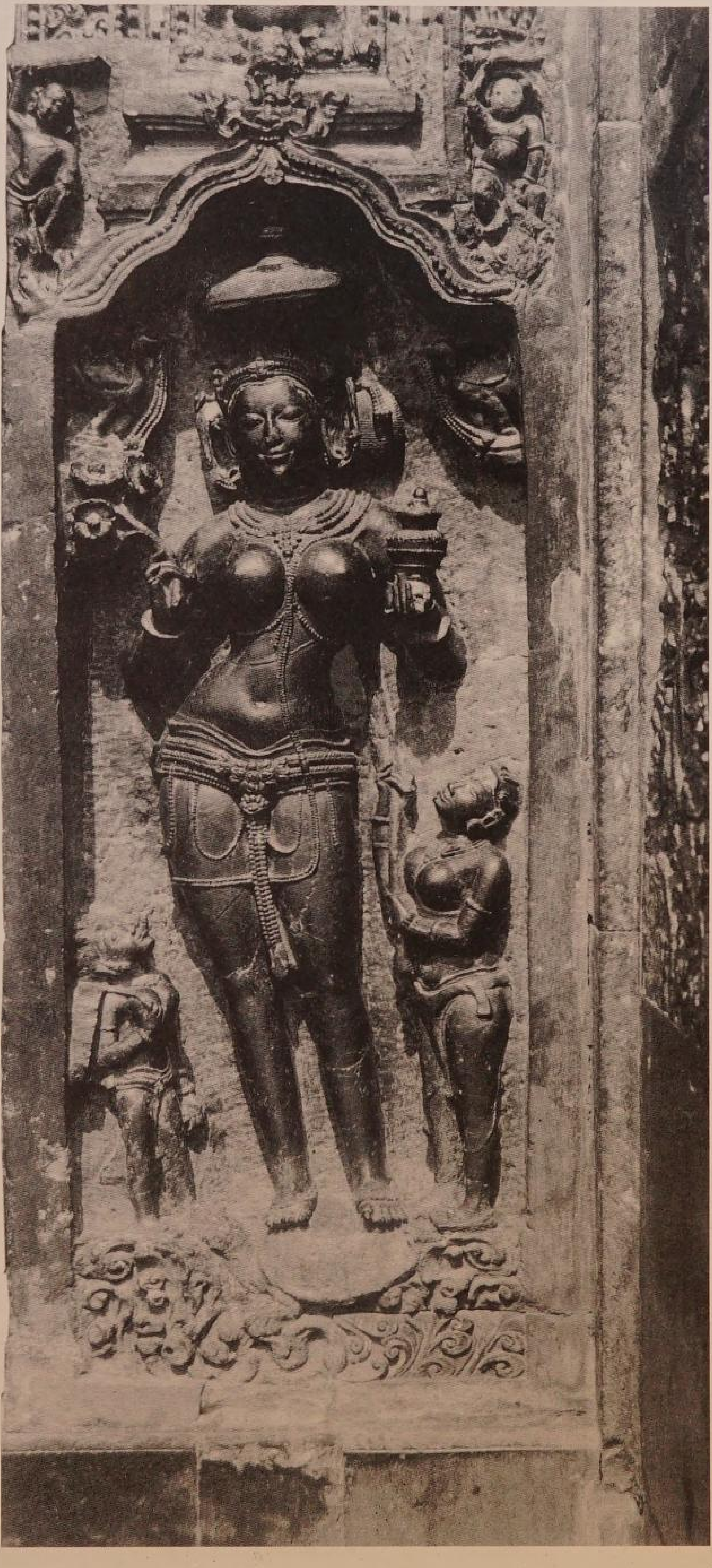


Fig. 45: Yamunā; reconstructed Kīcakeśvarī temple, Khiching, *c*. tenth century.

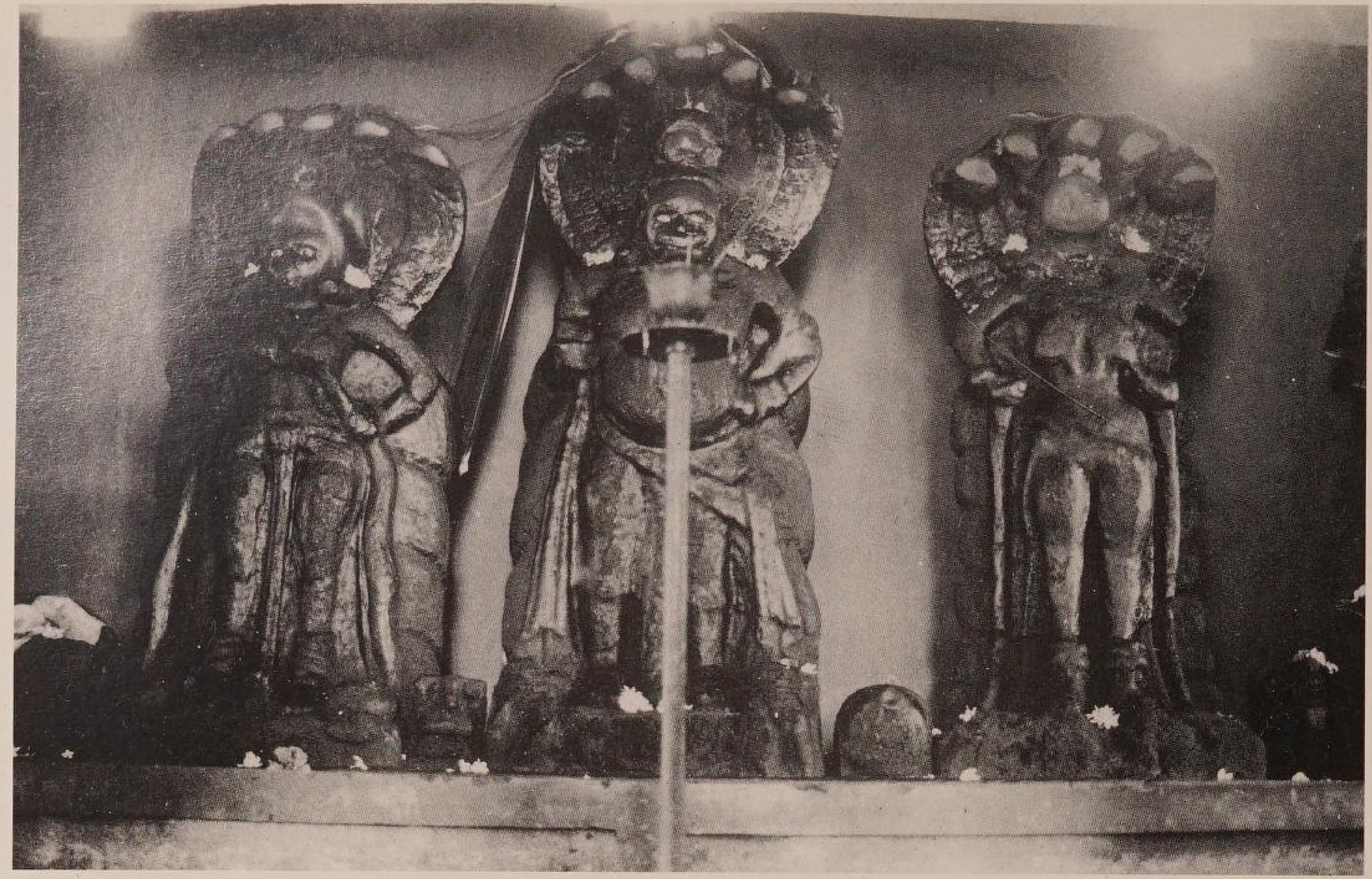
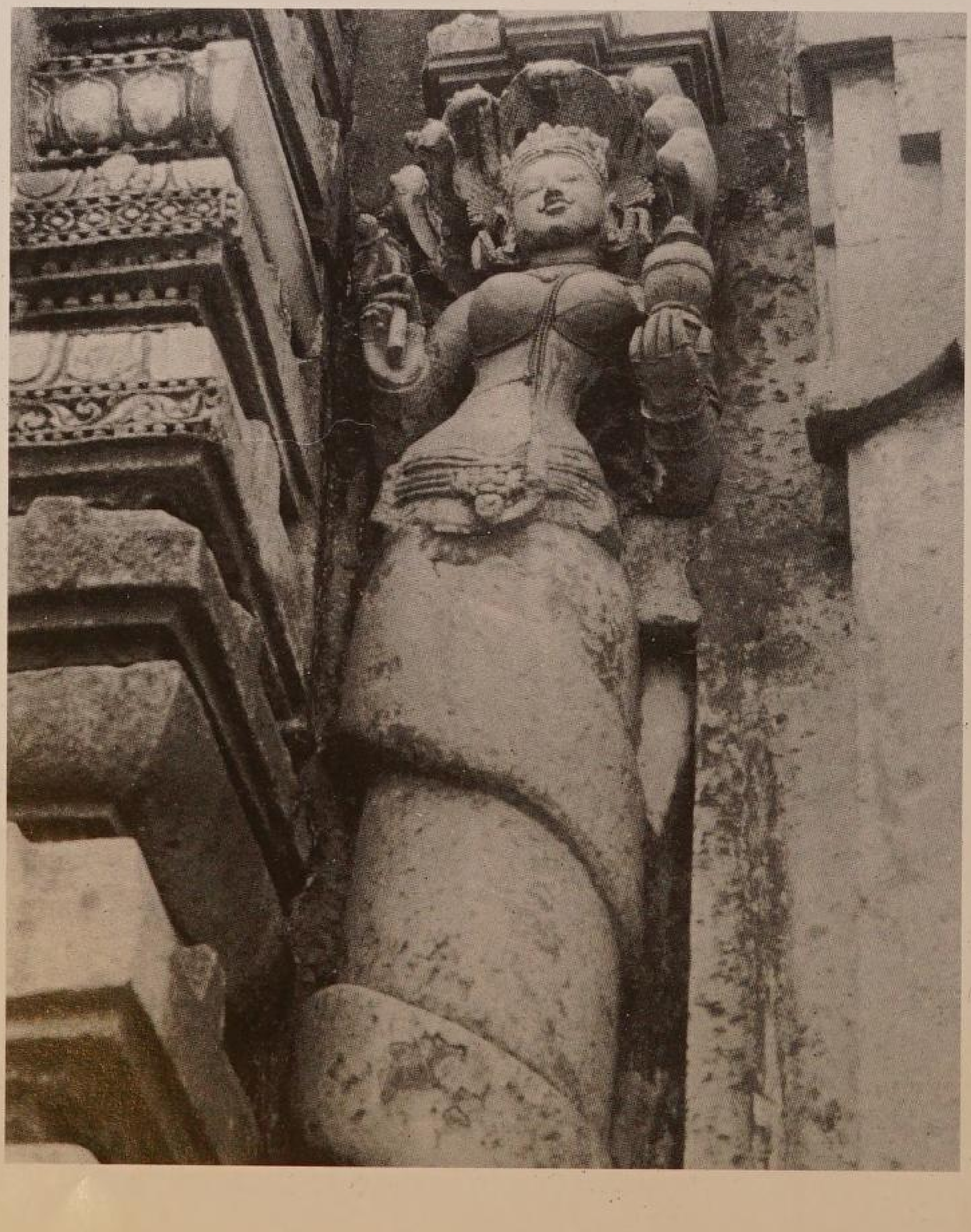


Fig. 46: Archaic trio of serpent deities formed by a *nāgarāja* flanked by two *nāgamātās*; village-goddess shrine, Sundarpada (outskirts of Bhubaneswar), *c*. second century BCE.

Fig. 47: *Nāgī-stambha*; reconstructed Kīcakeśvarī temple, Khiching, *c*. tenth century.



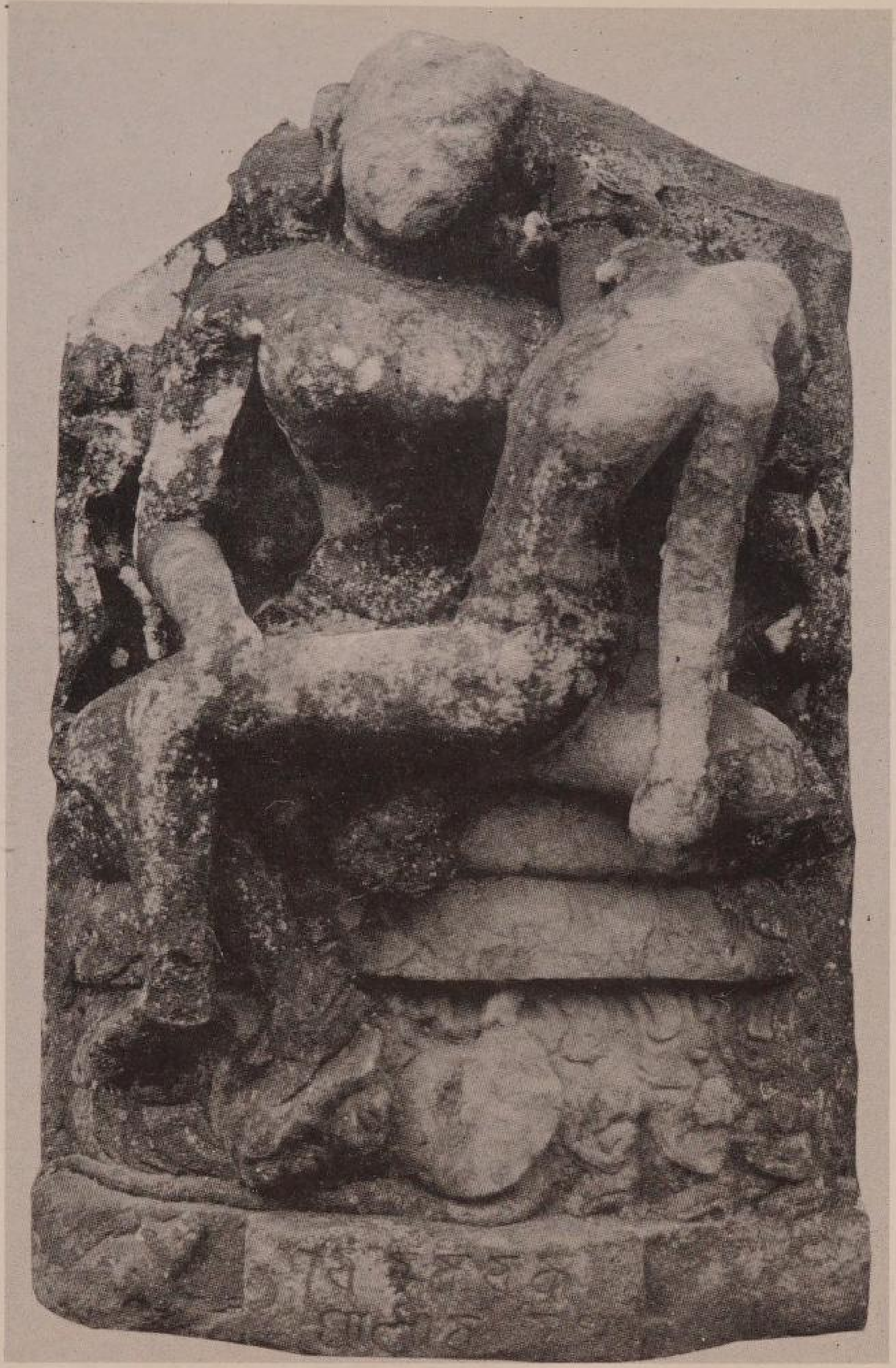
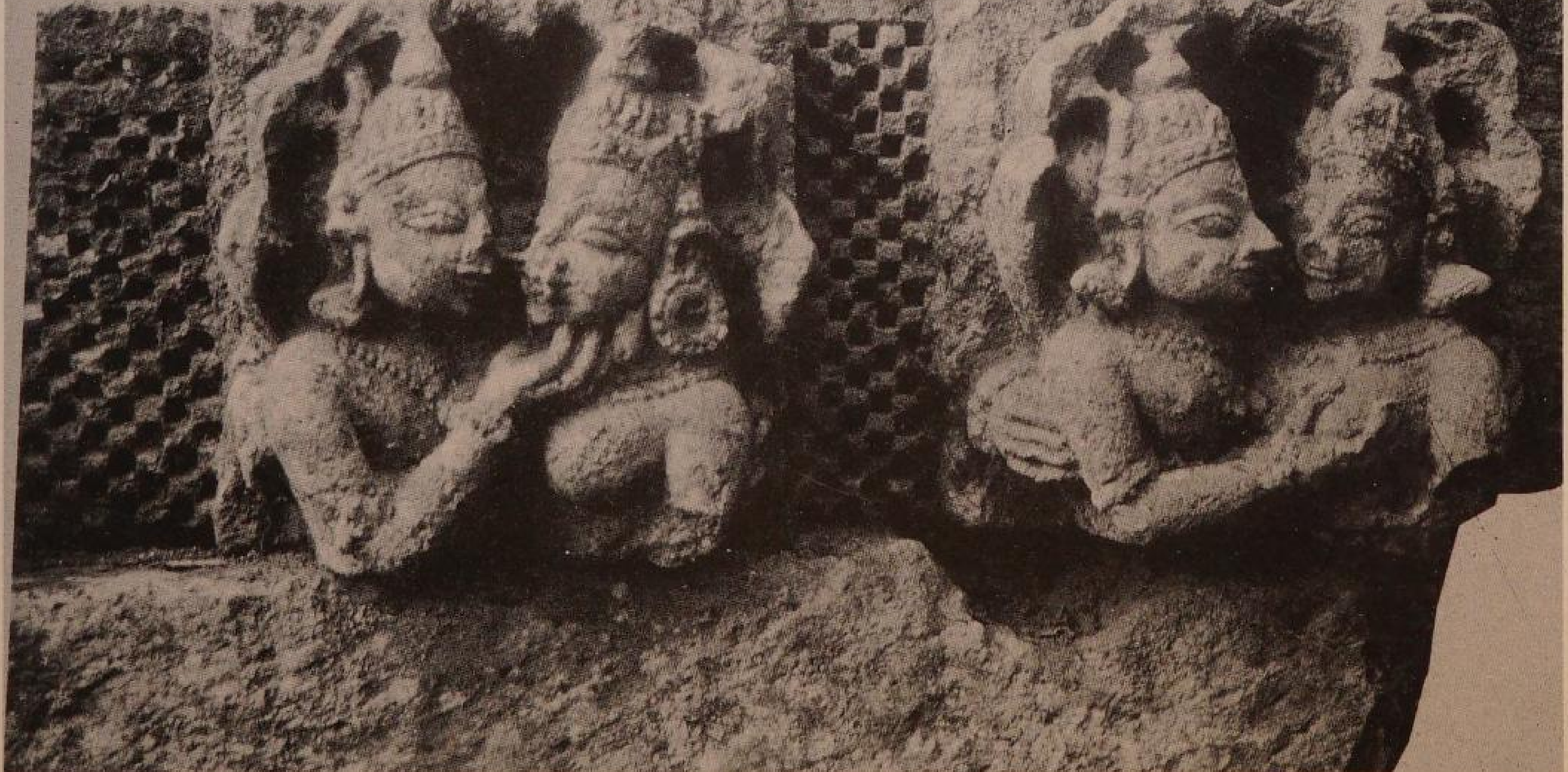


Fig. 48: Loose image of Manasā/Jaratkāru; Trilocaneśvara temple, Kundesvara, eleventh or twelfth century.

Fig. 49: Nāga-nāgī forming amorous couples; ruined Somanātha temple, Vishnupur, thirteenth or fourteenth century.



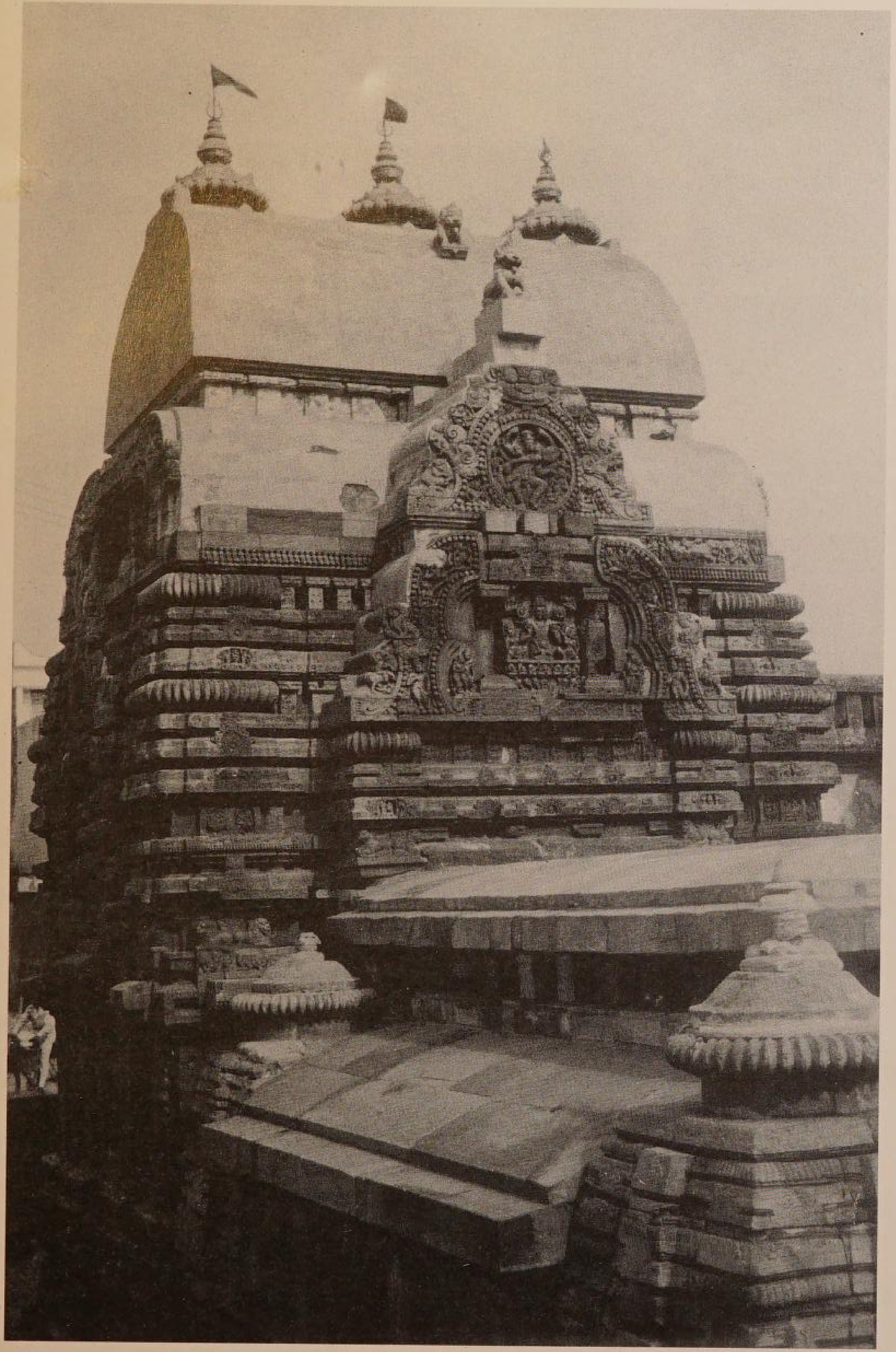


Fig. 50: Vaitāl Deul; Bhubaneswar, eighth century.

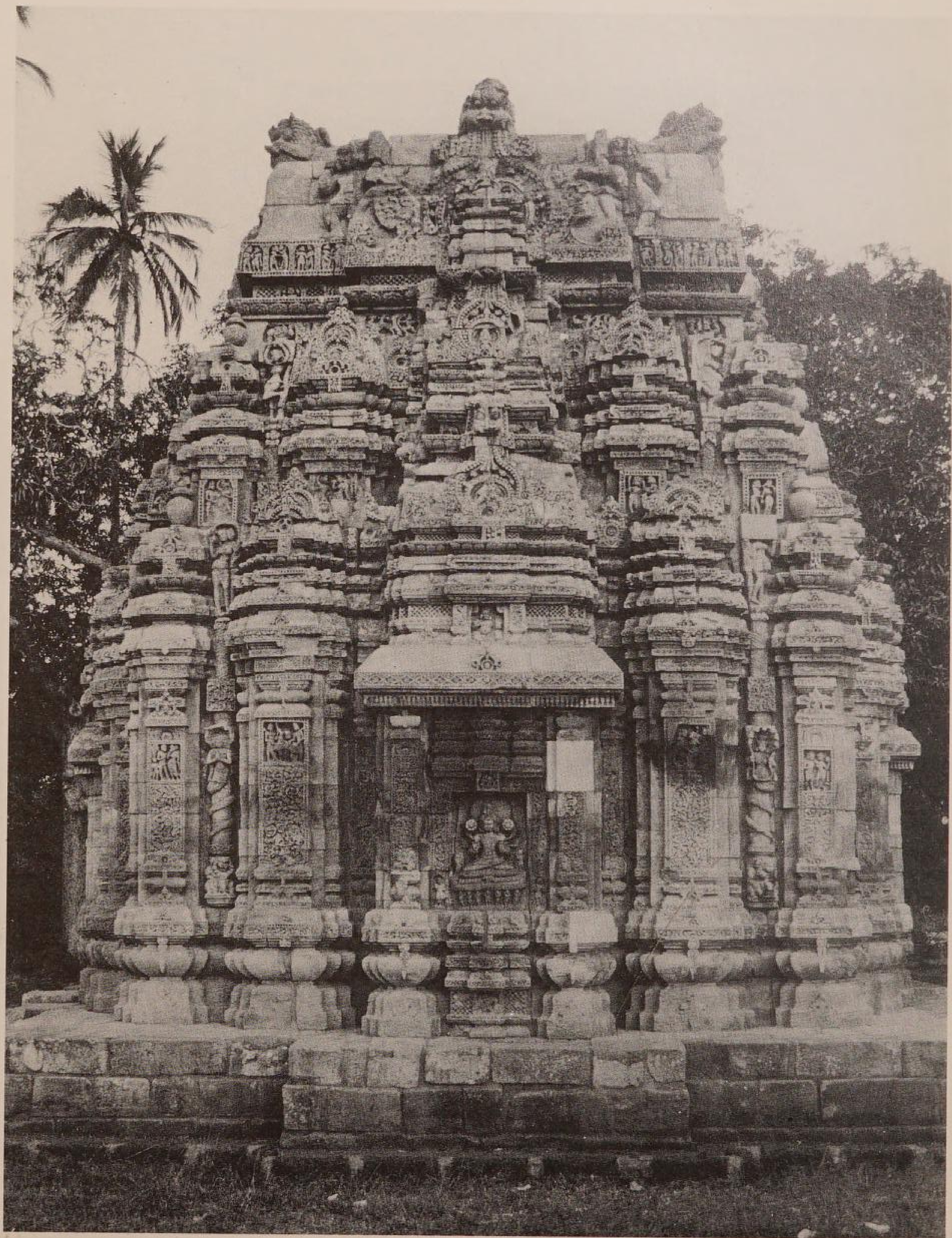


Fig. 51: Vārāhī temple; Chaurasi, tenth century.

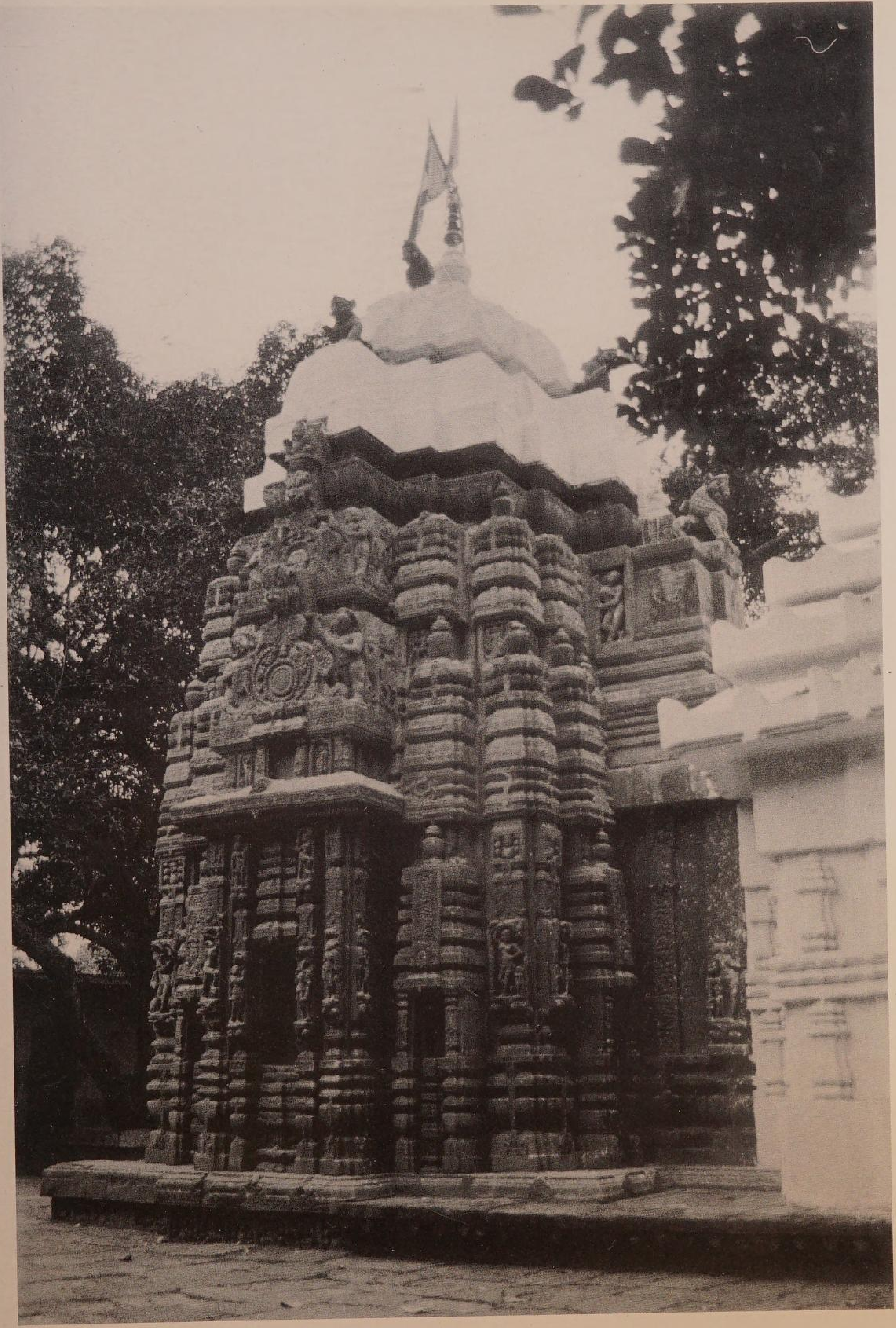


Fig. 52: Gaurī temple; Bhubaneswar, *c*. tenth century.

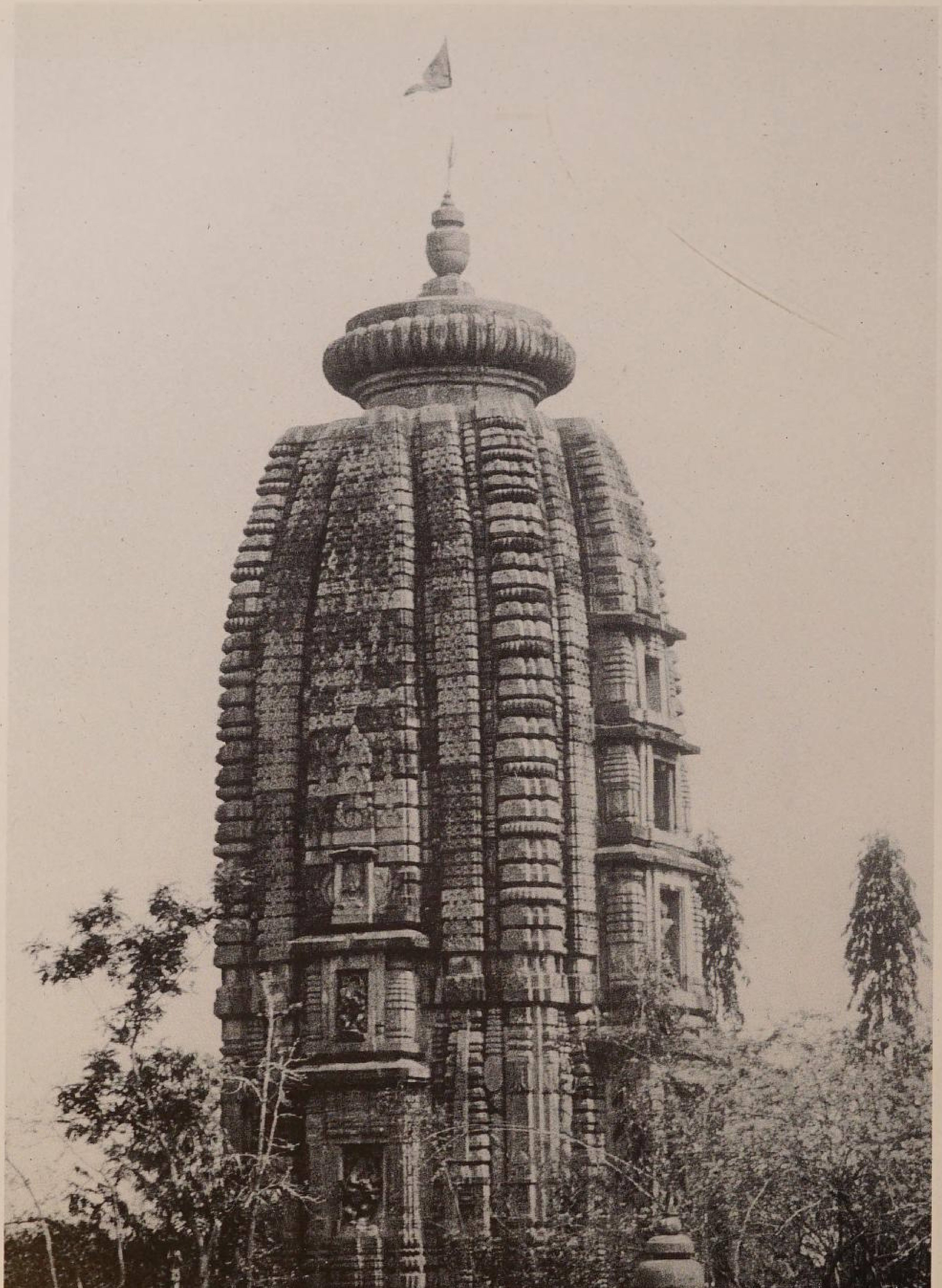


Fig. 53: Reconstructed Kīcakeśvarī temple, built employing the stone materials of a collapsed great Śiva temple and of some of its compound shrines; Khiching, *c.* tenth century.

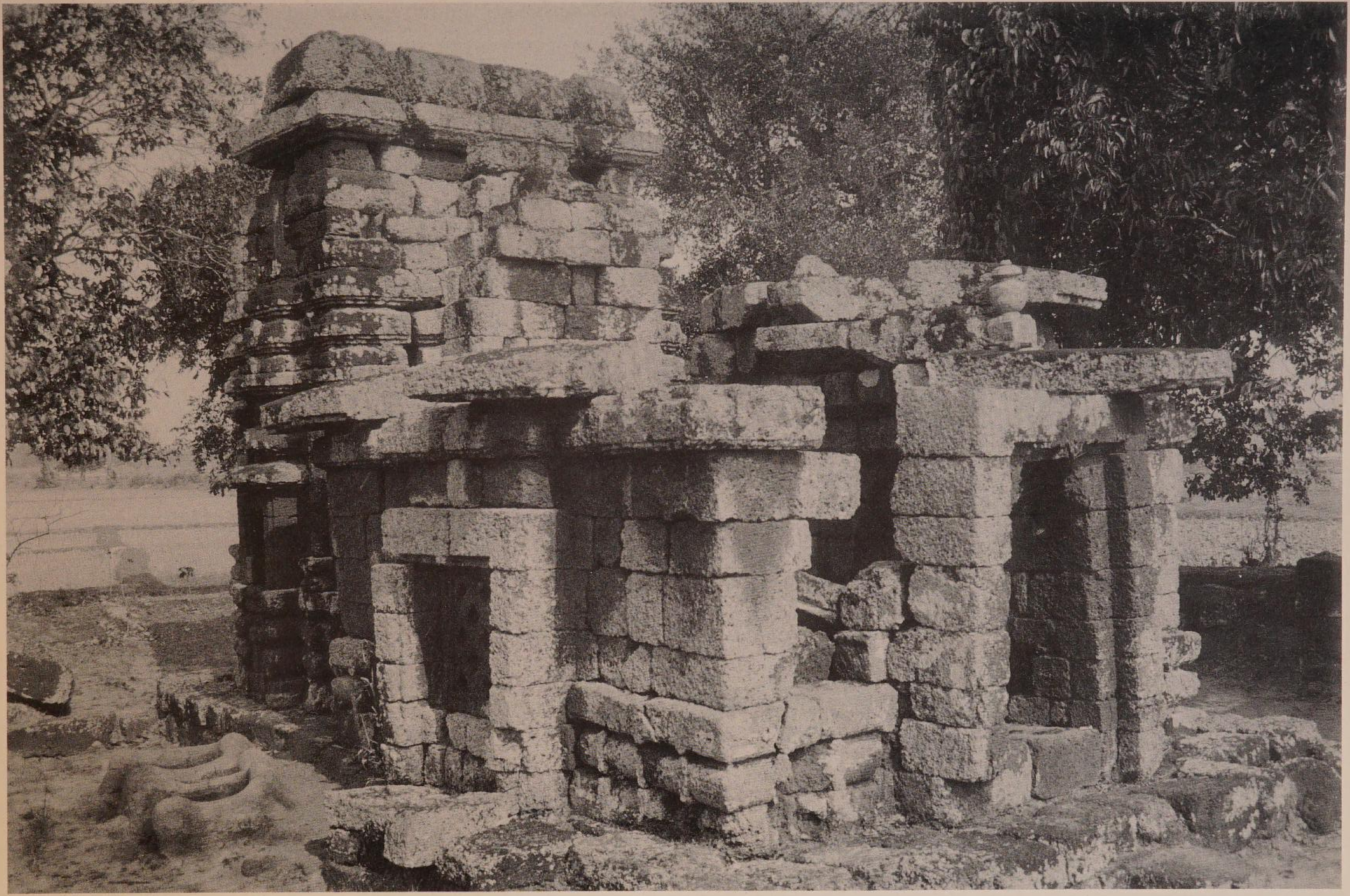


Fig. 54: Caṇḍī temple; Kishorpur, tenth or eleventh century.

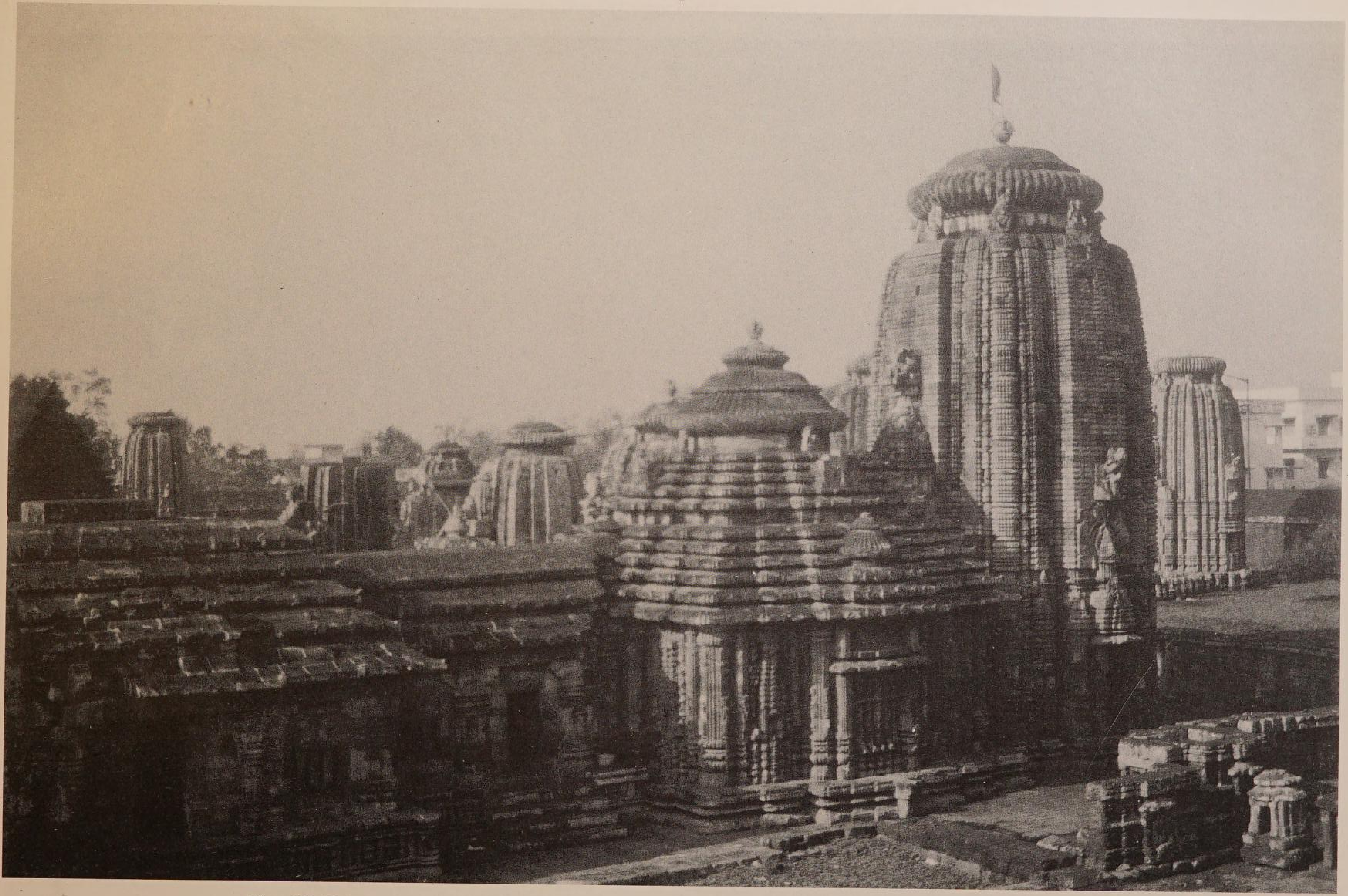


Fig. 55: Pārvatī temple; Liṅgarāja temple complex, Bhubaneswar, thirteenth century.

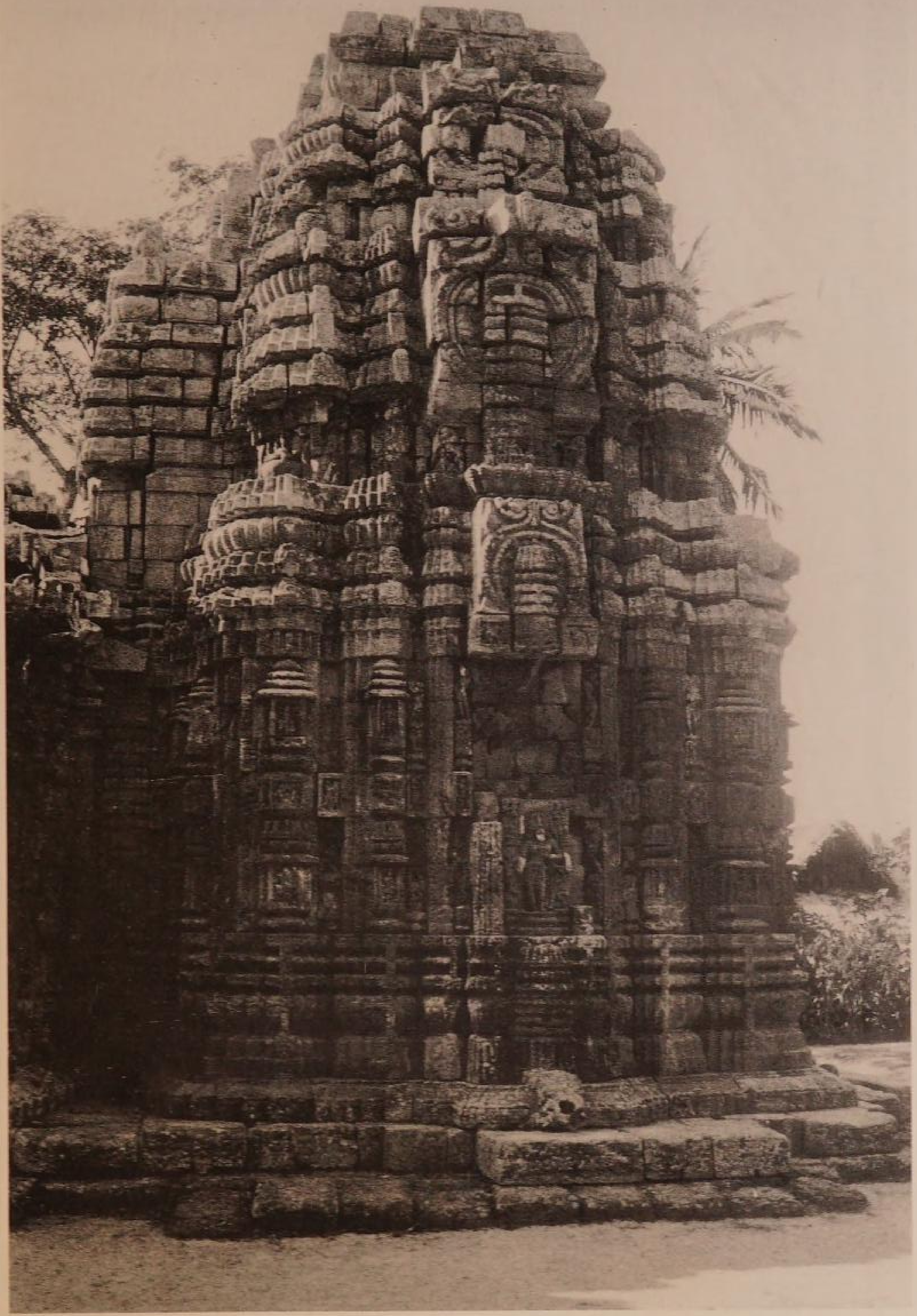


Fig. 56: Gaṅgeśvarī temple; Beyalisbati, thirteenth century.

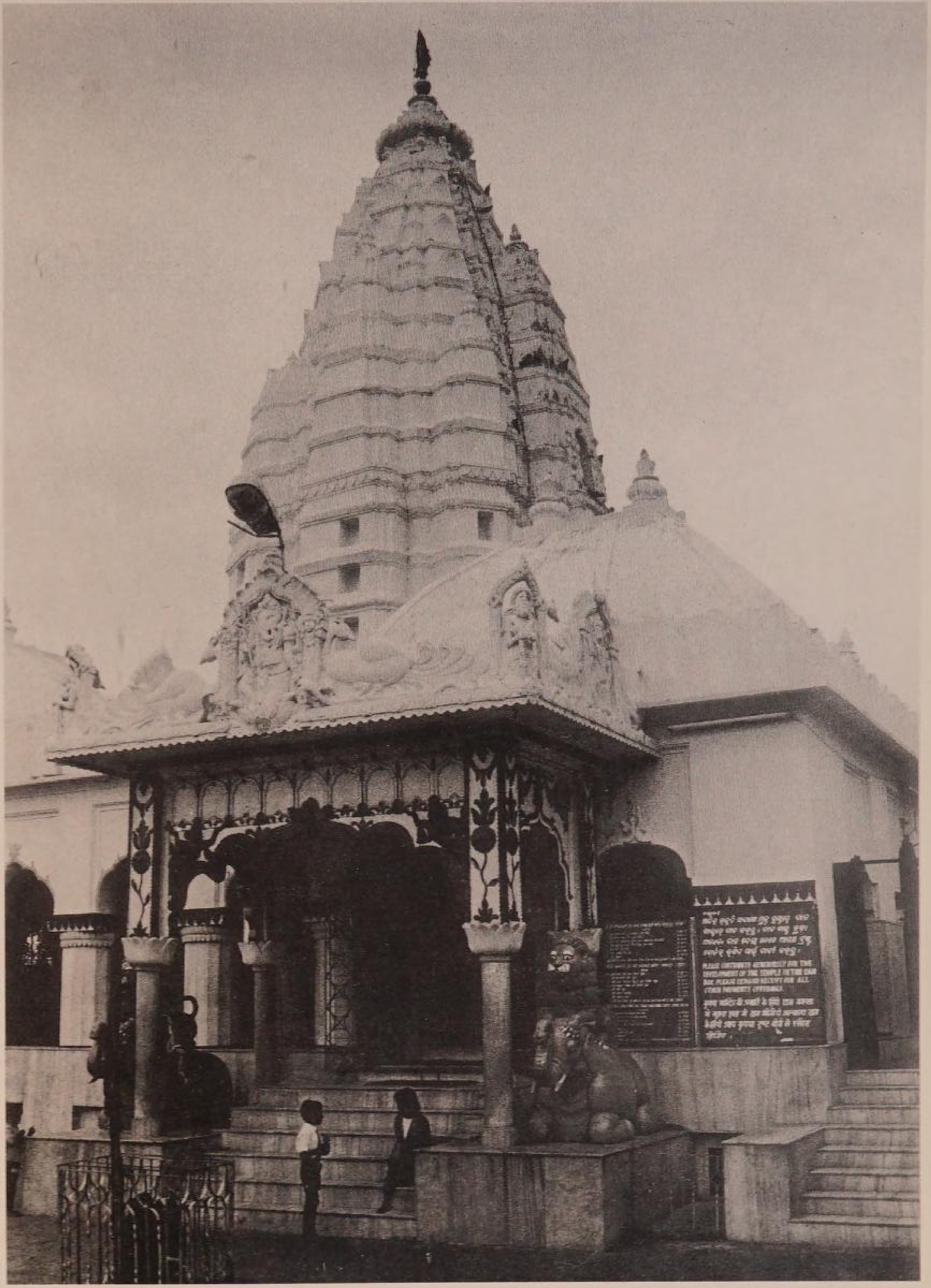


Fig. 57: Samalei temple at Sambalpur, between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century.

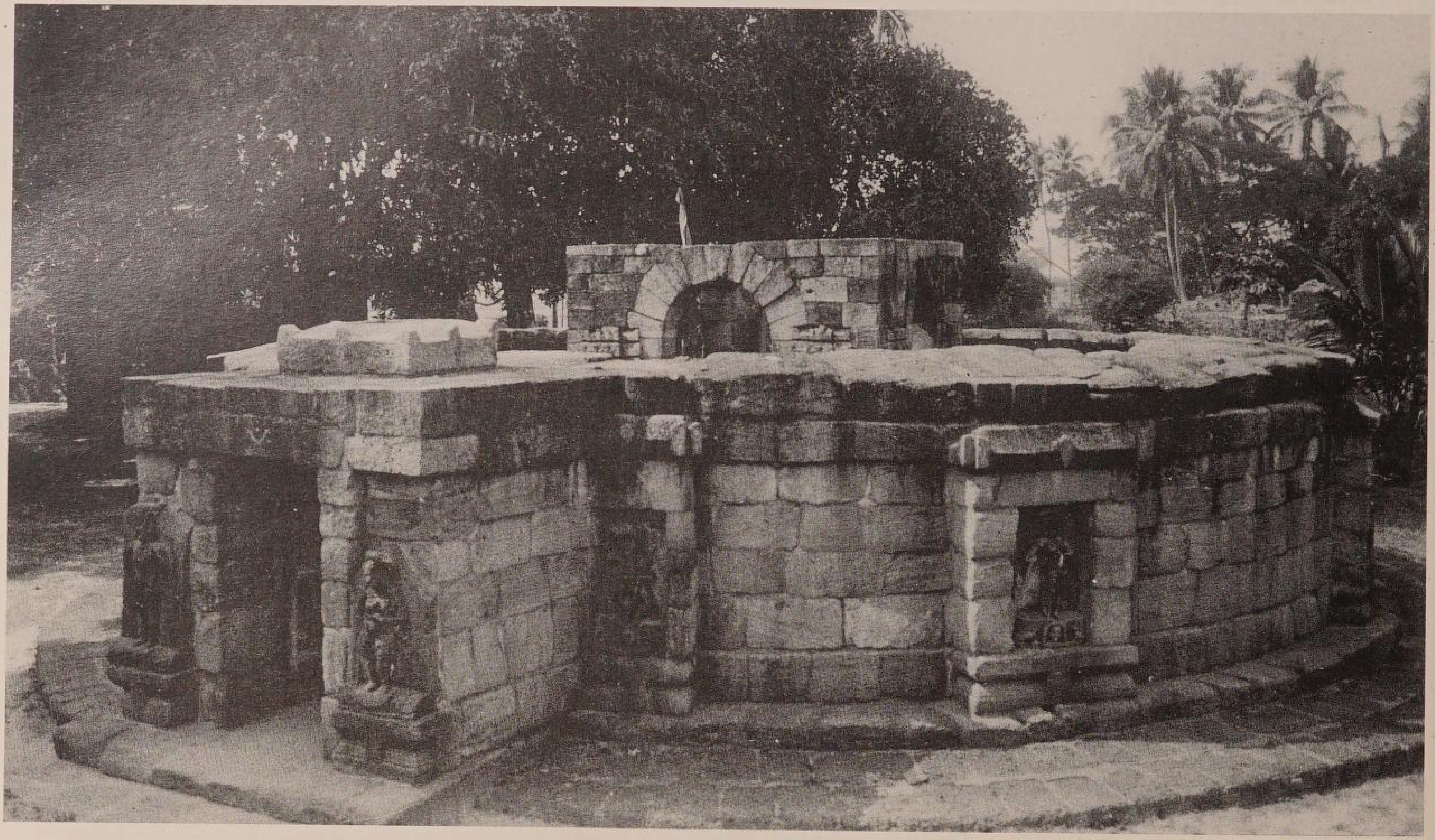
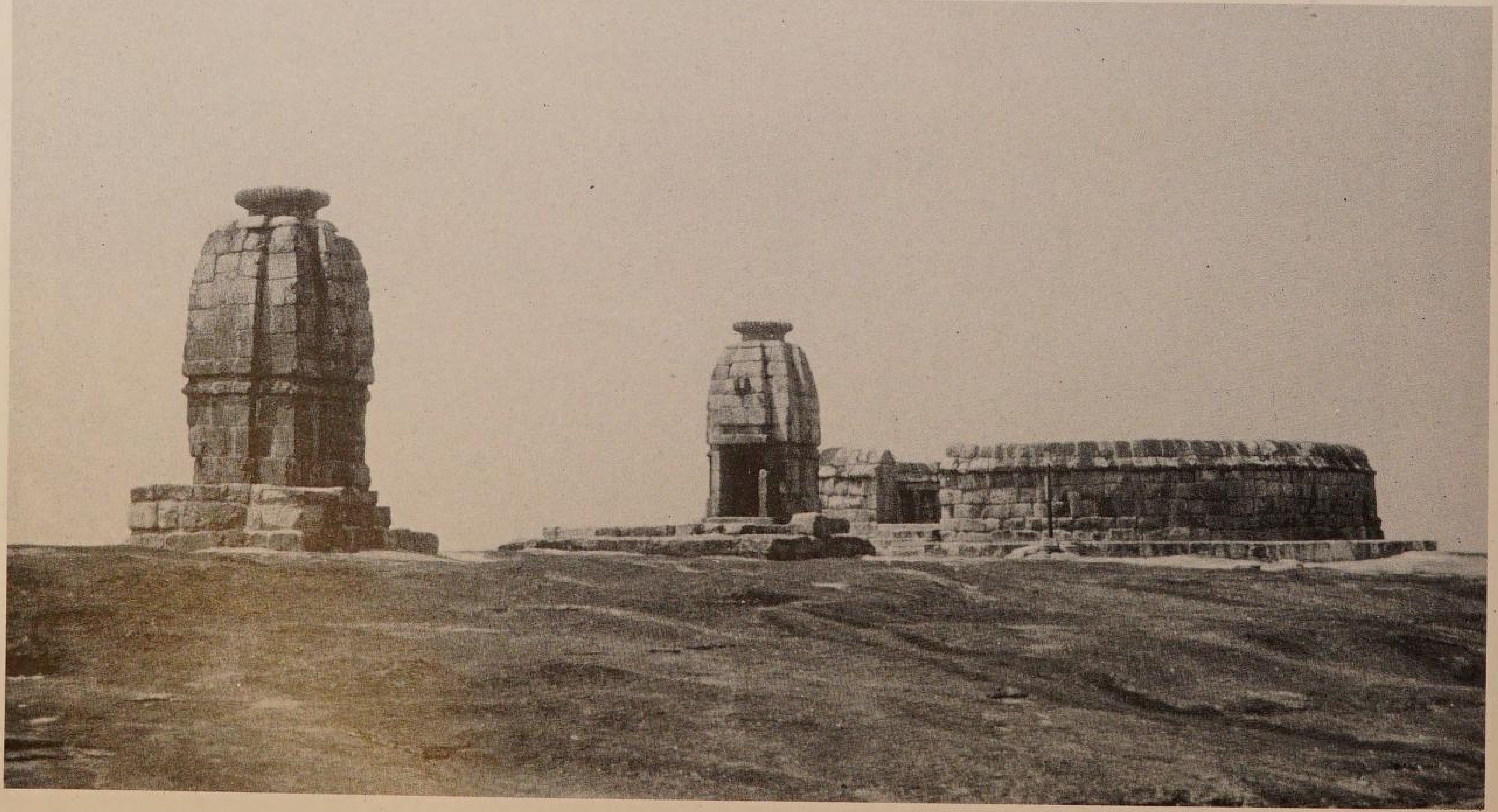


Fig. 58: Circular hypaethral Sixty-Four Yoginī temple; Hirapur, *c.* ninth century.

Fig. 59: Circular hypaethral Sixty-Four Yoginī temple; Ranipur-Jharial, *c.* tenth century.



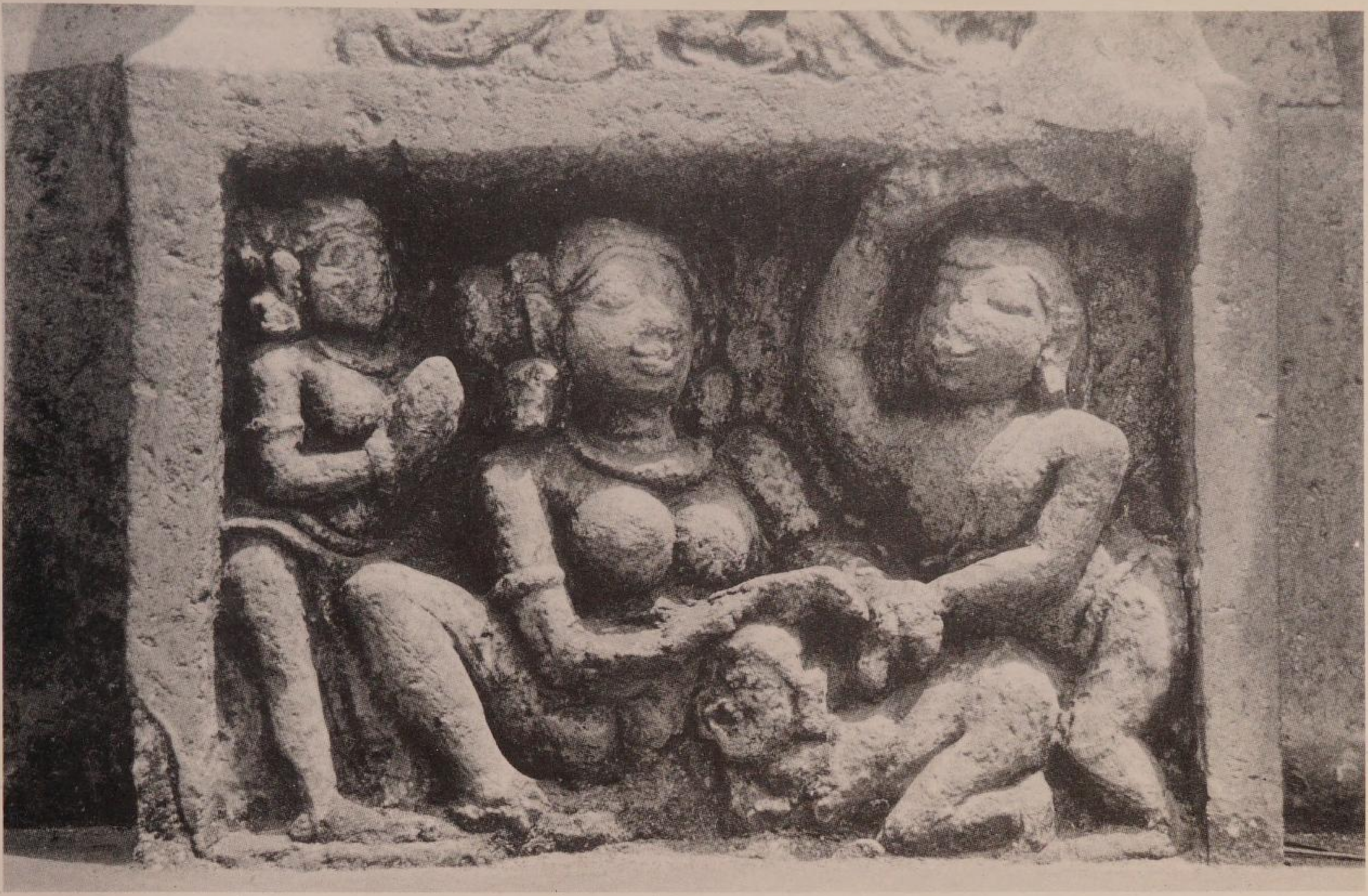
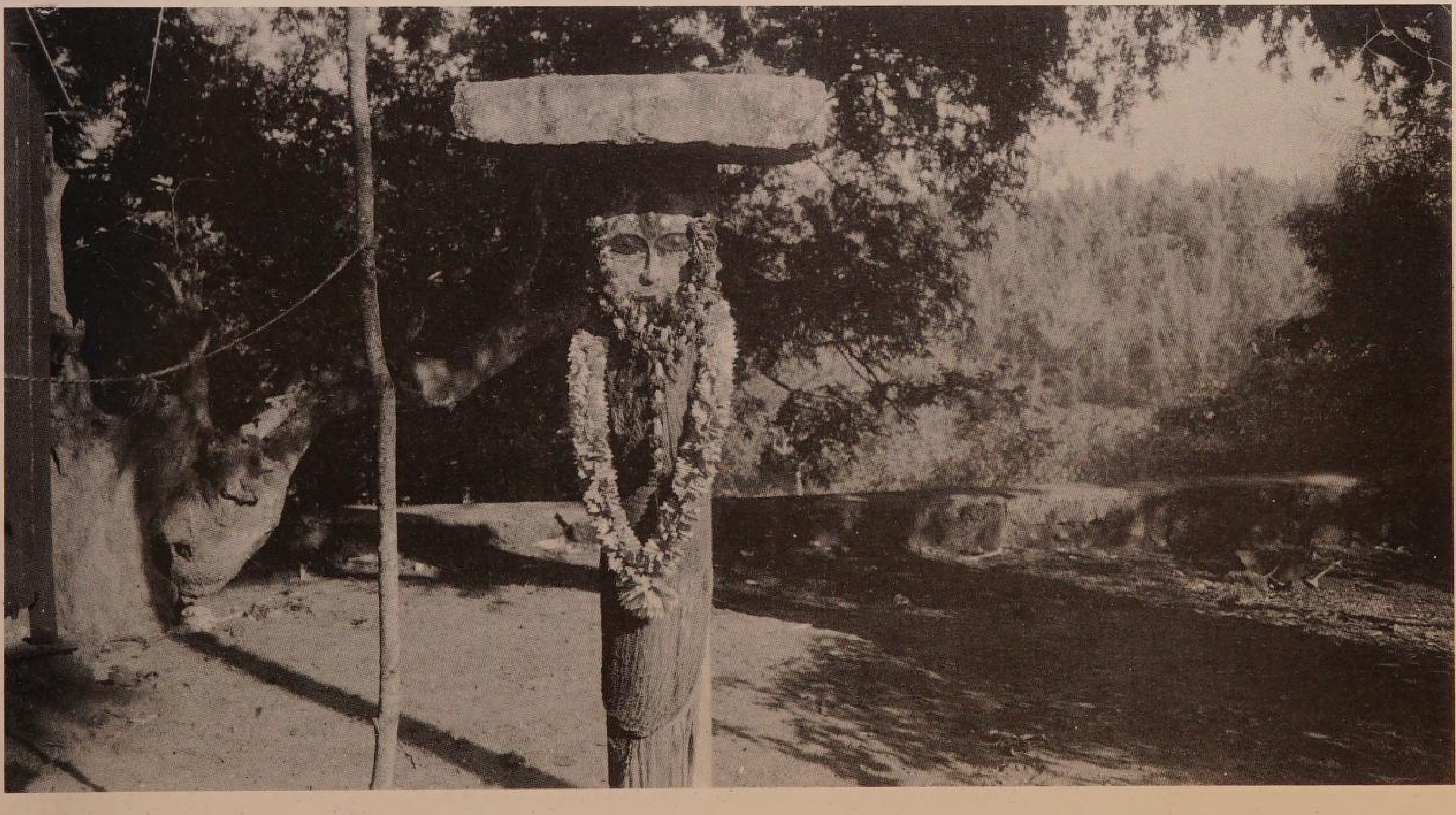


Fig. 60: Scene illustrating a Tāntric erotic ritual; reconstructed Kīcakeśvarī temple, Khiching, *c*. tenth century.

Fig. 61: *Yūpa* anthropomorphised by means of the addition of three eyes and a lolling tongue so as to suggest an image of Kālī in pillar-form; Bāliharacaṇḍī temple on the seashore south of Puri.



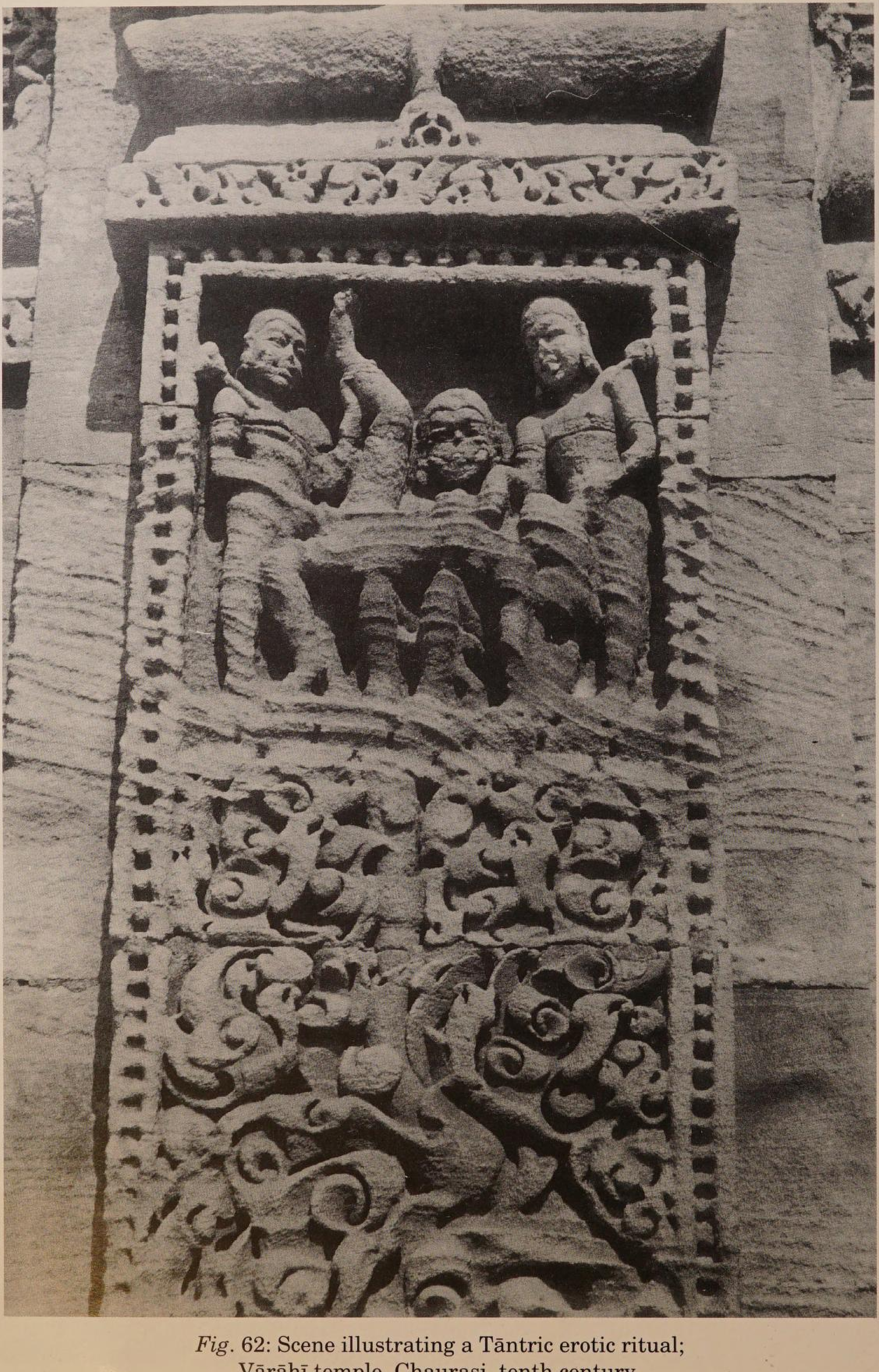


Fig. 62: Scene illustrating a Tāntric erotic ritual;
Vārāhī temple, Chaurasi, tenth century.

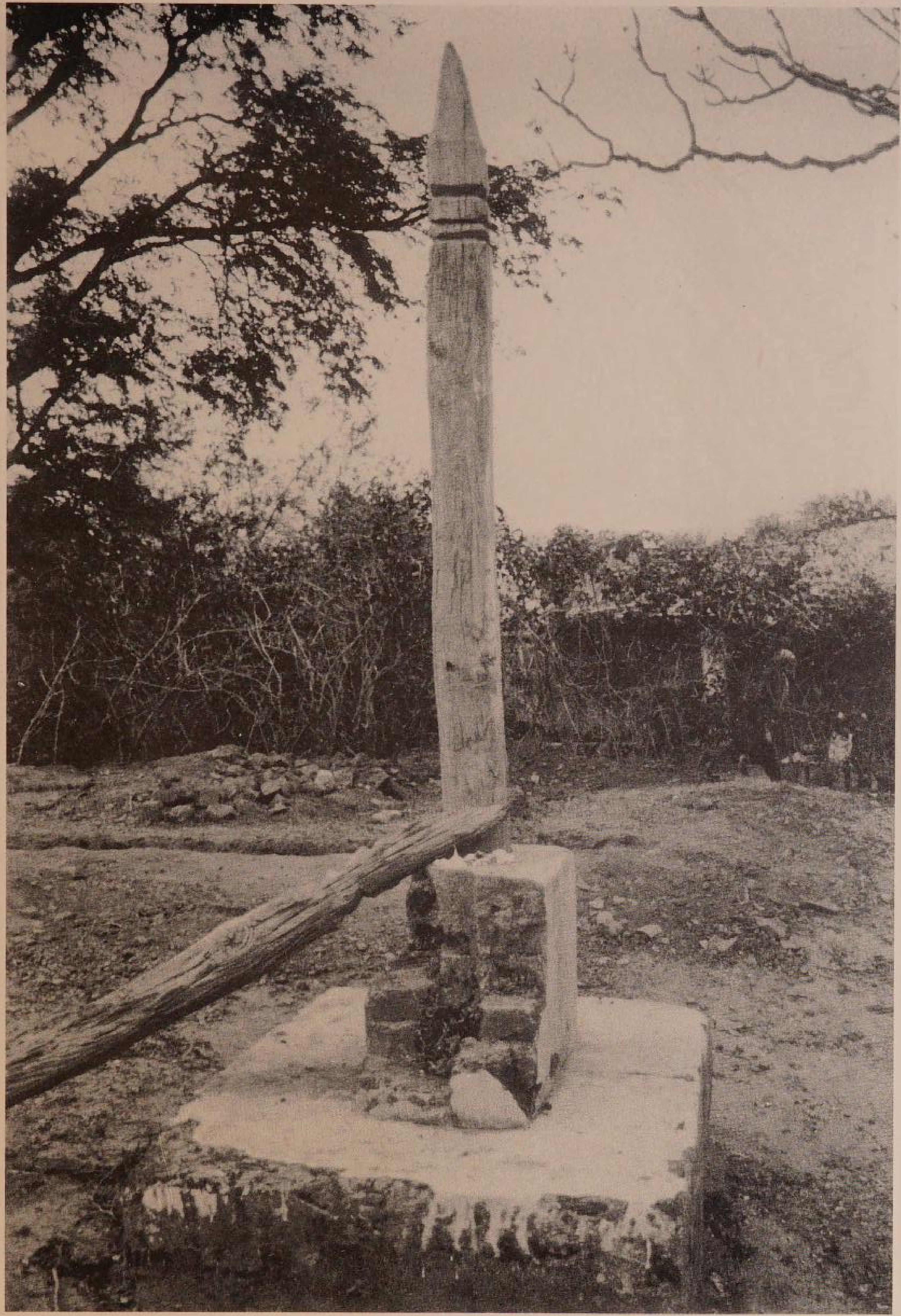


Fig. 63: Wooden *yūpa*; Samaleśvarī temple, Sonepur.

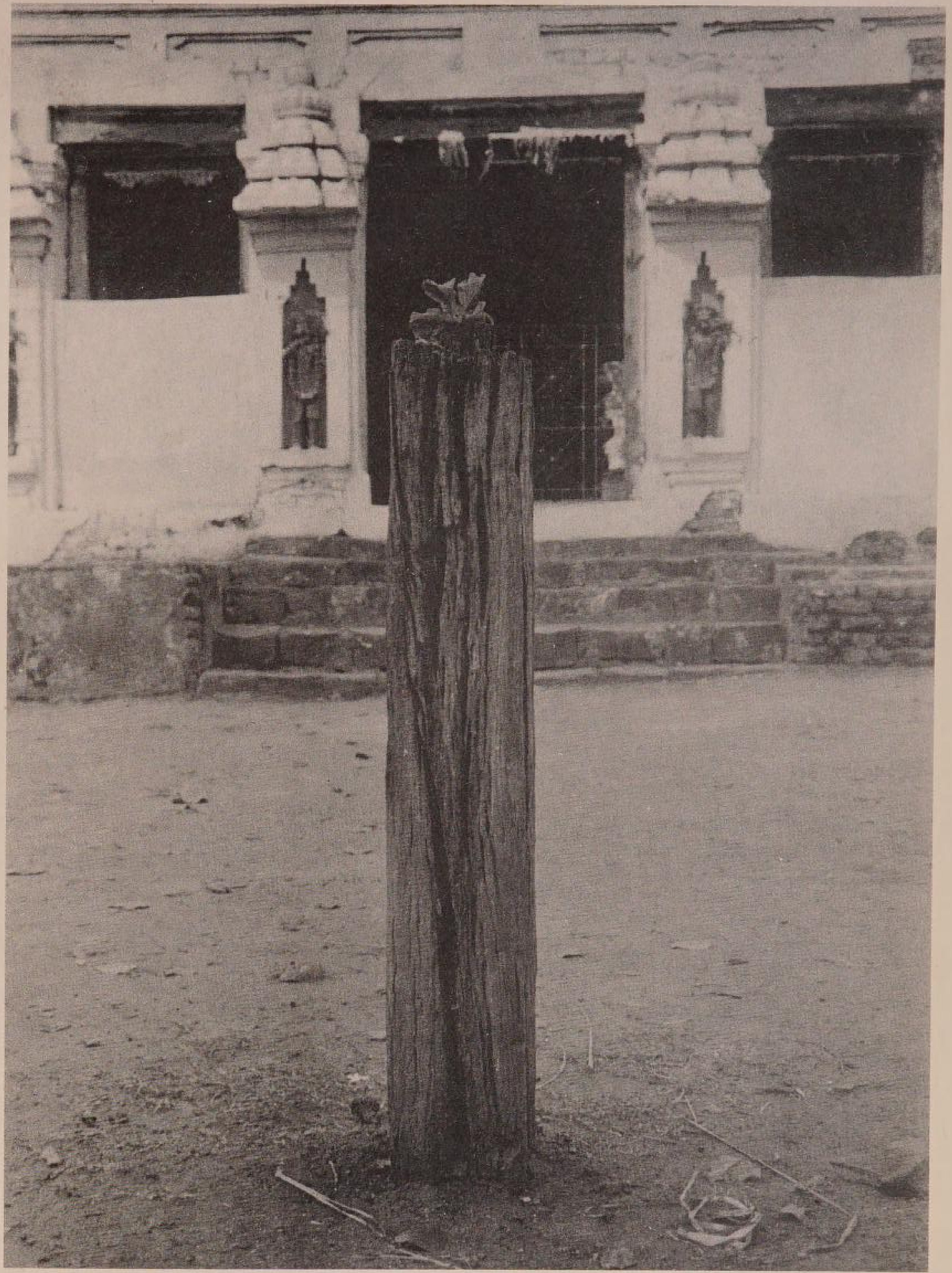


Fig. 64: Wooden *yūpa* worshipped as the representative image of the pillar-goddess Stambheśvarī or Khambheśvarī at the time of sacrifice; Khambheśvarī temple, Sonepur.

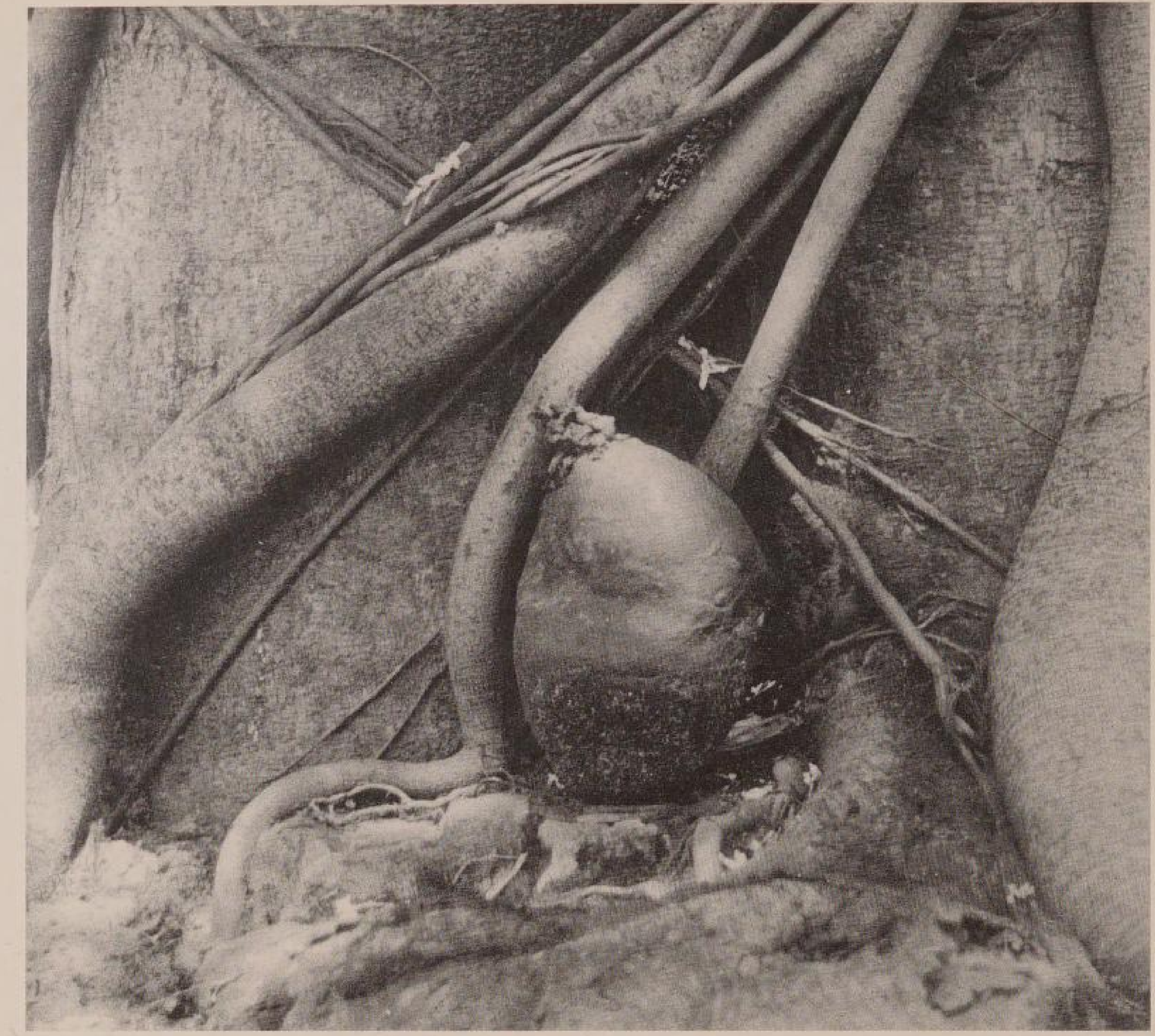
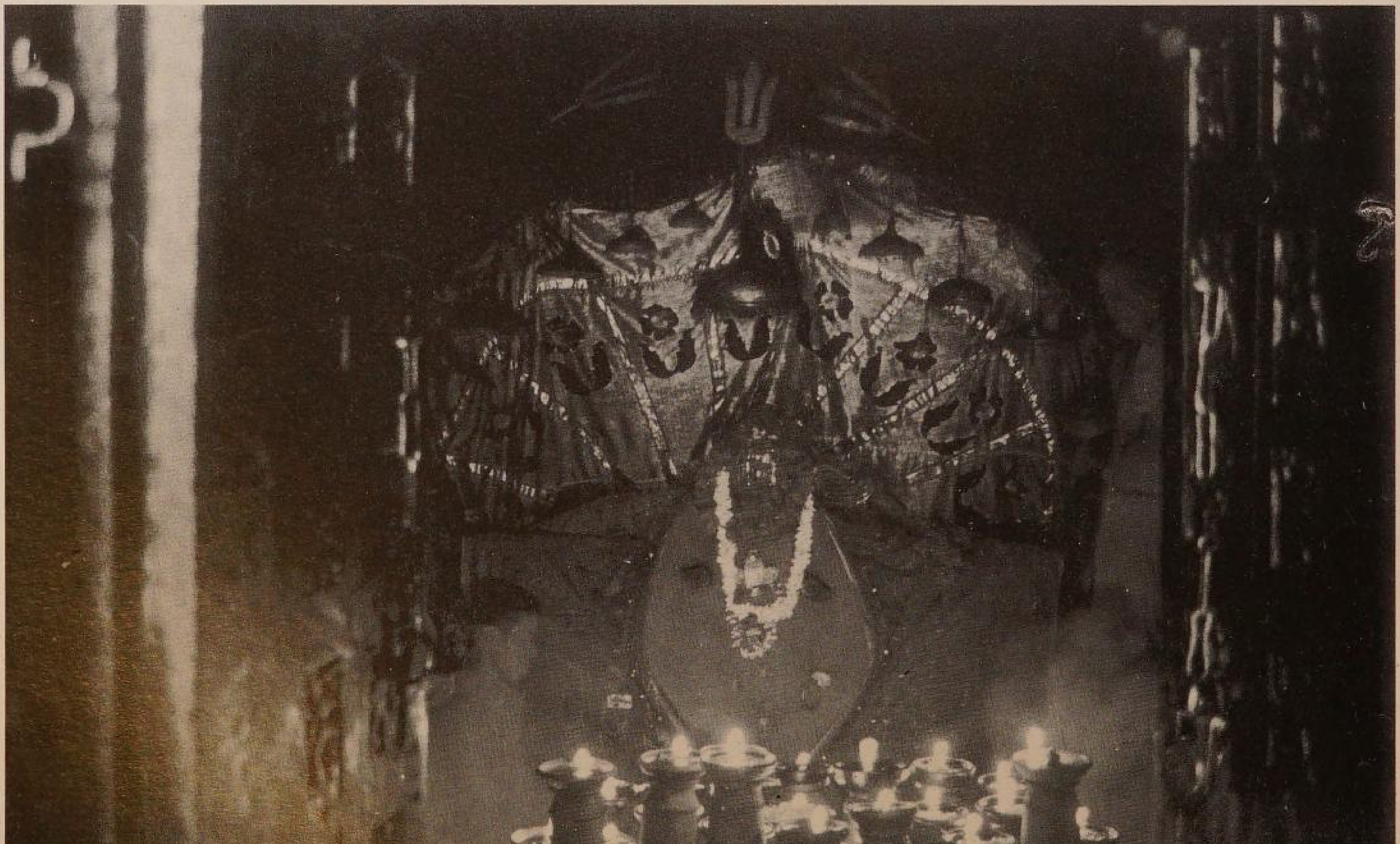
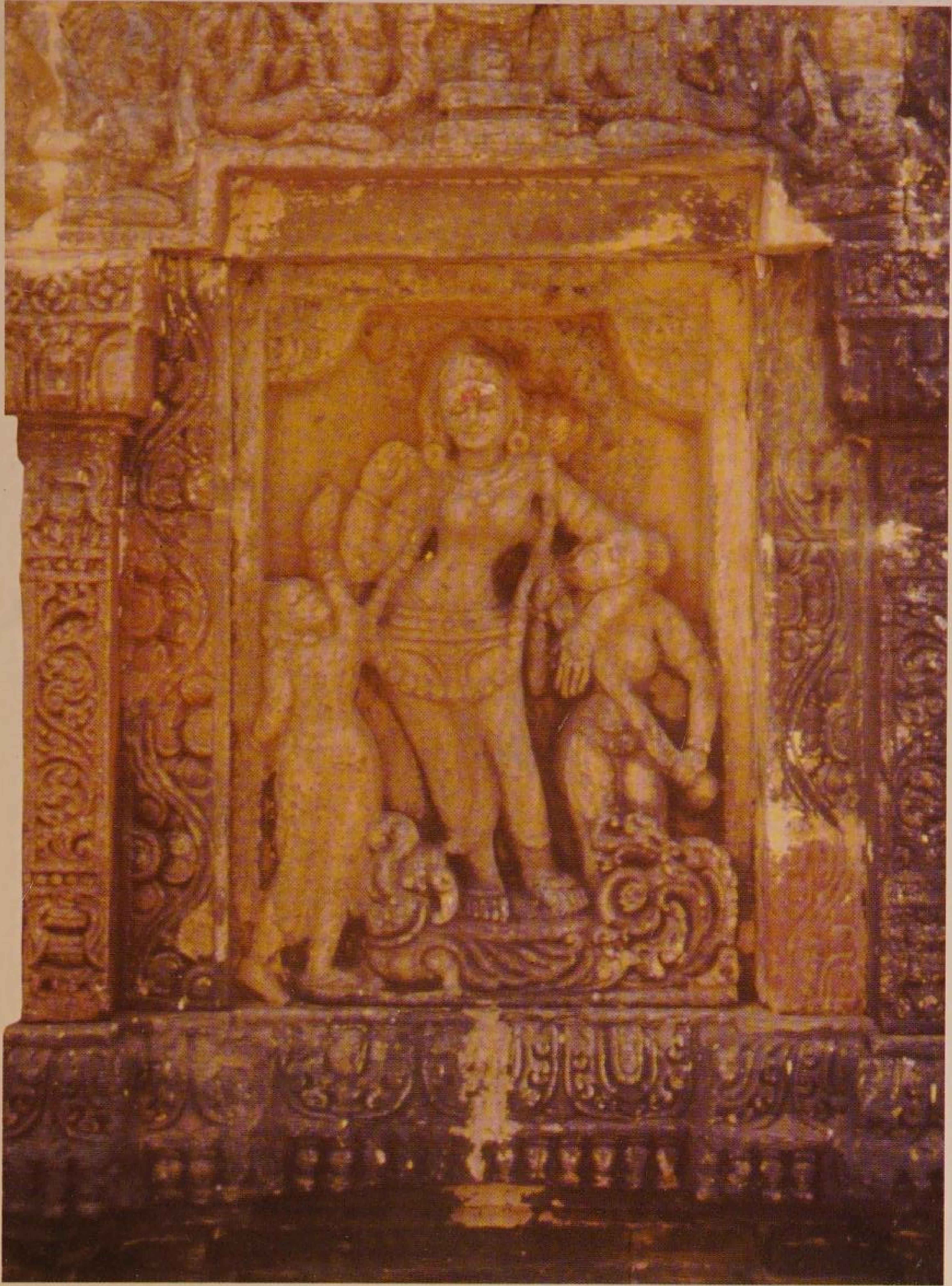


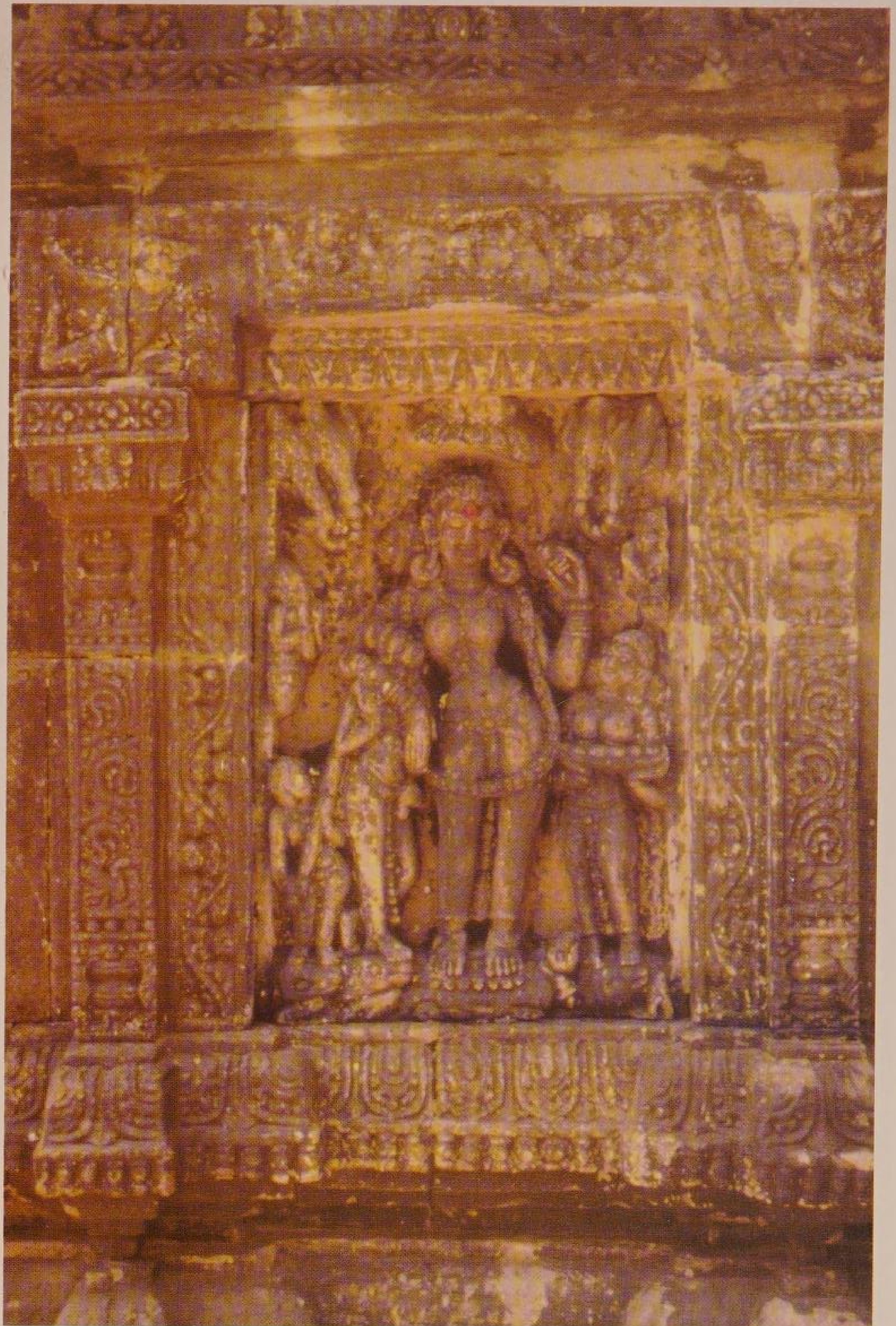
Fig. 65: A natural cleft in the trunk of a tree, smeared with red paste, is worshipped as the 'self-generated' image of a *yakṣī*; outskirts of Bhubaneswar.

Fig. 66: The aniconic cult image of goddess Samalei, a natural oval-shaped boulder camouflaged in the guise of a woman's face; Samalei temple, Sambalpur.

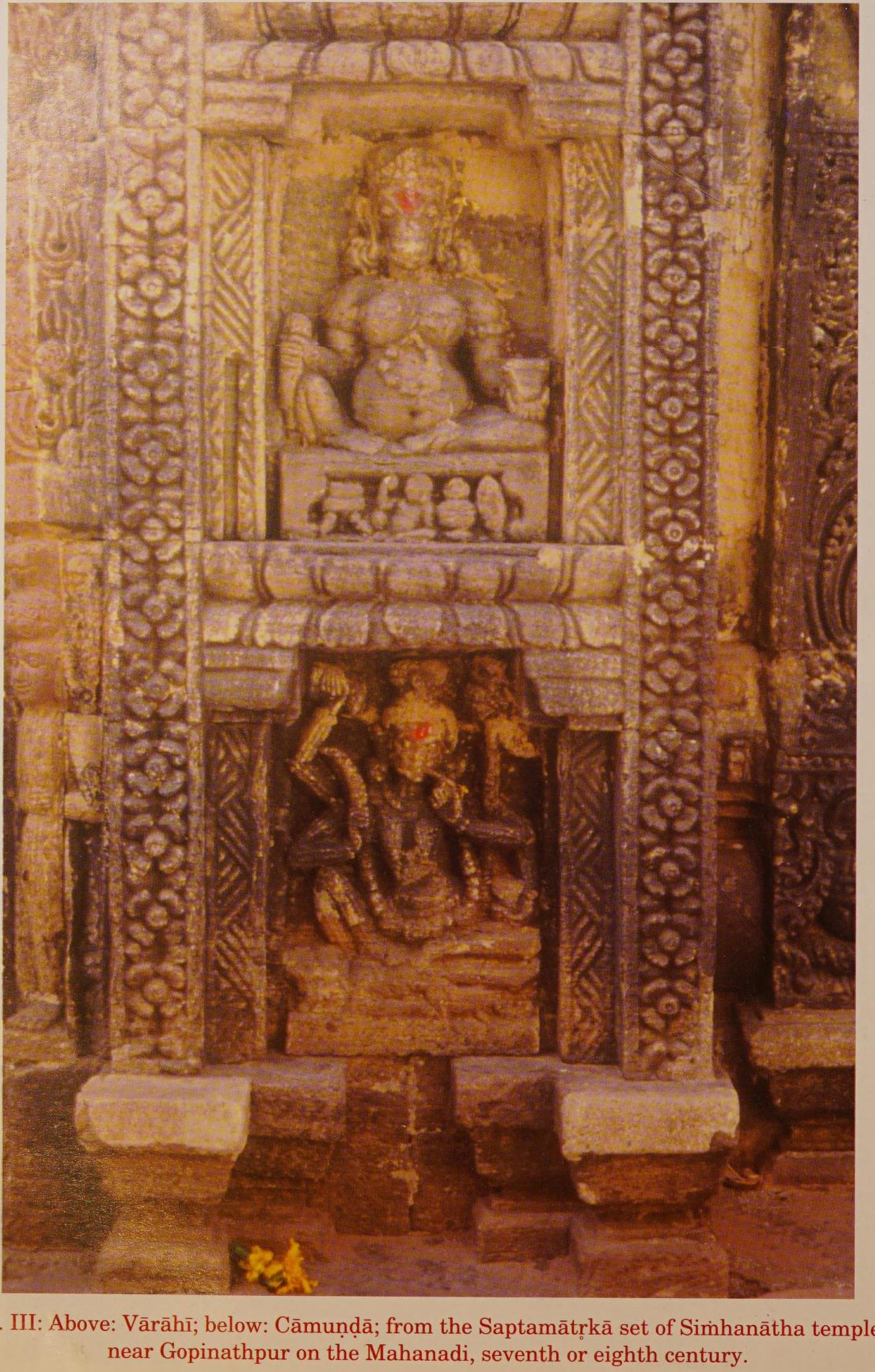




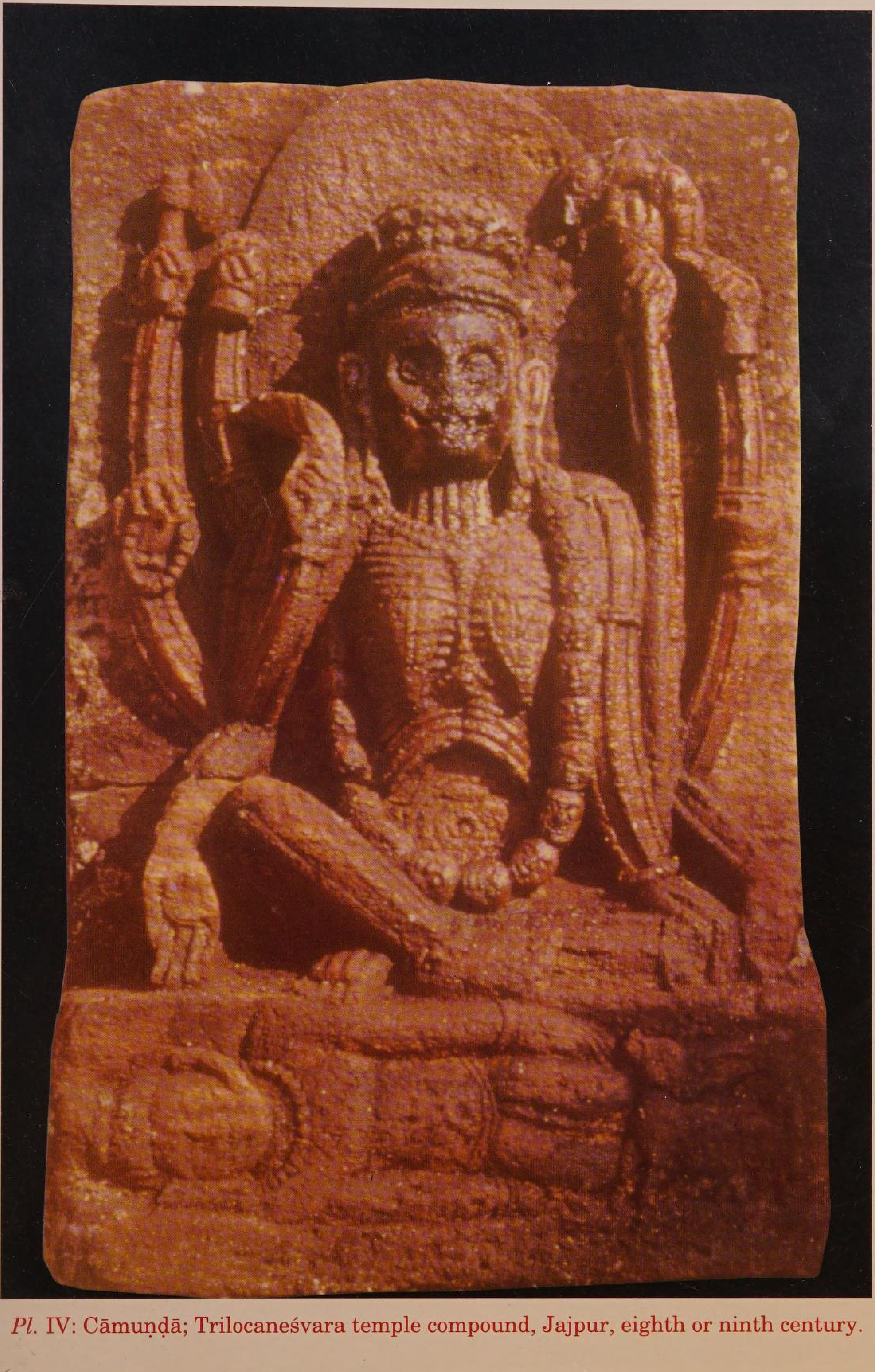
Pl. I: Gaṅgā; Siṁhanātha temple near Gopinathpur on the Mahanadi, seventh or eighth century.



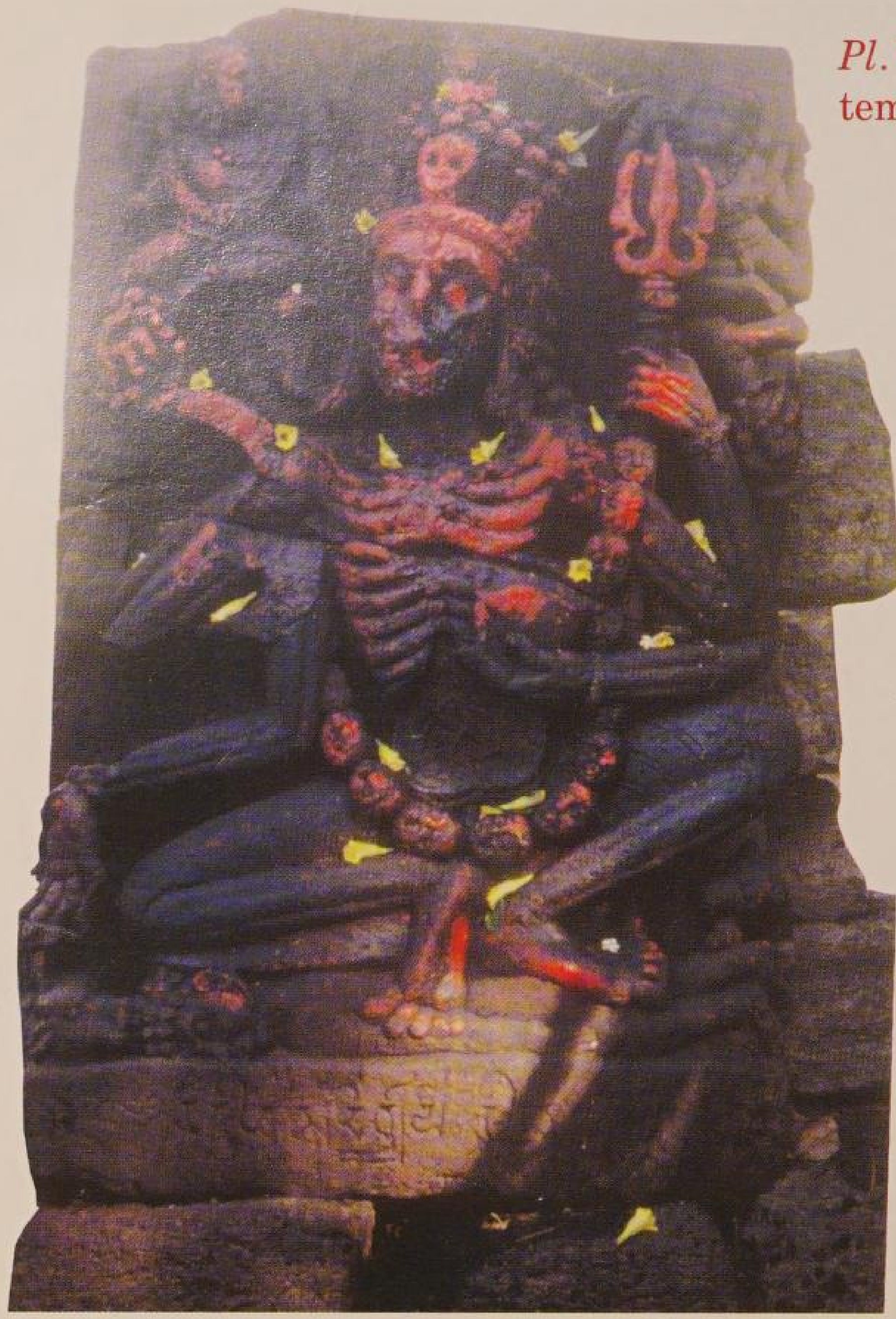
Pl. II: Yamunā; Siṁhanātha temple near Gopinathpur on the Mahanadi, seventh or eighth century.



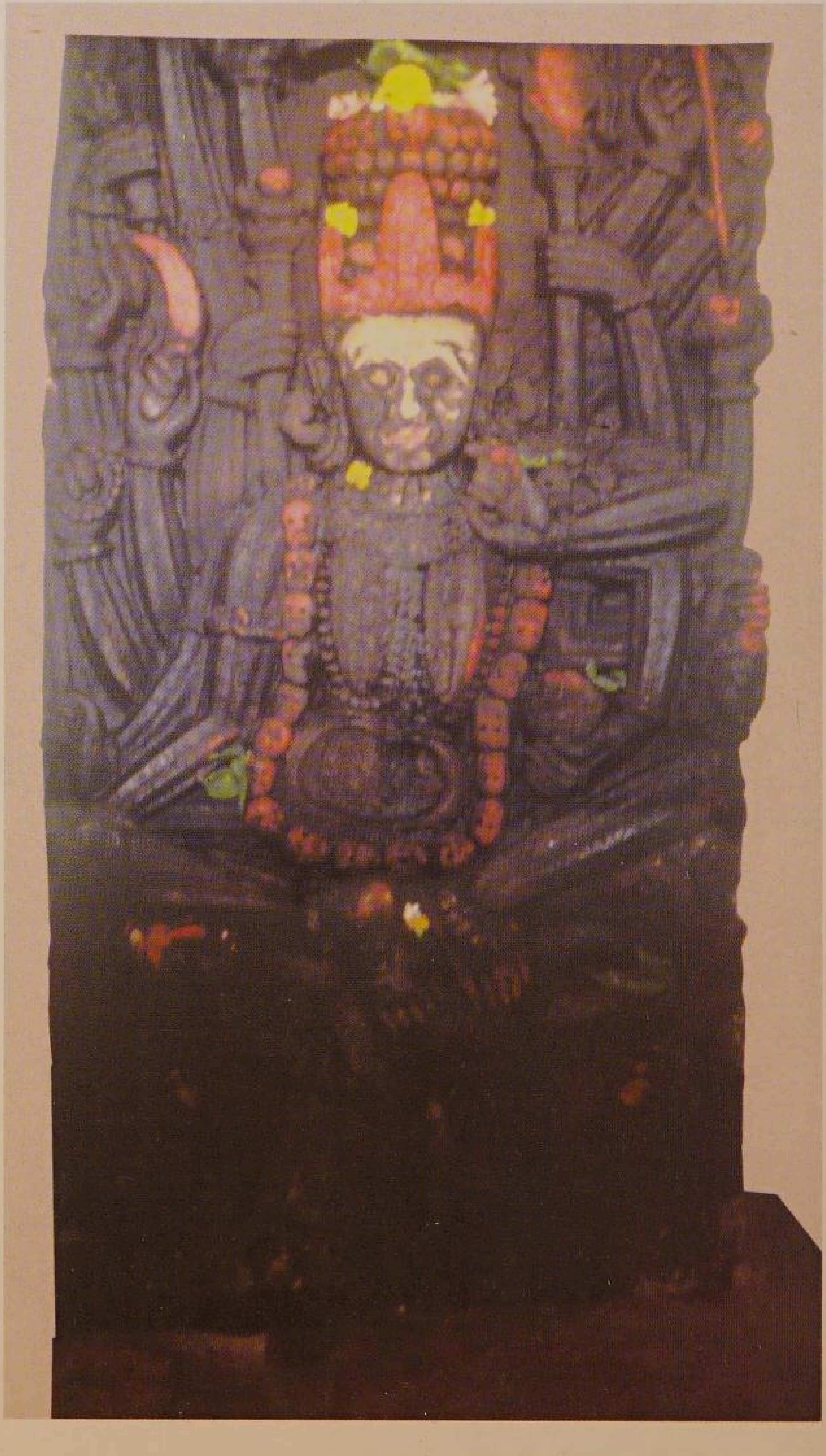
Pl. III: Above: Vārāhī; below: Cāmuṇḍā; from the Saptamātr̥kā set of Siṁhanātha temple near Gopinathpur on the Mahanadi, seventh or eighth century.



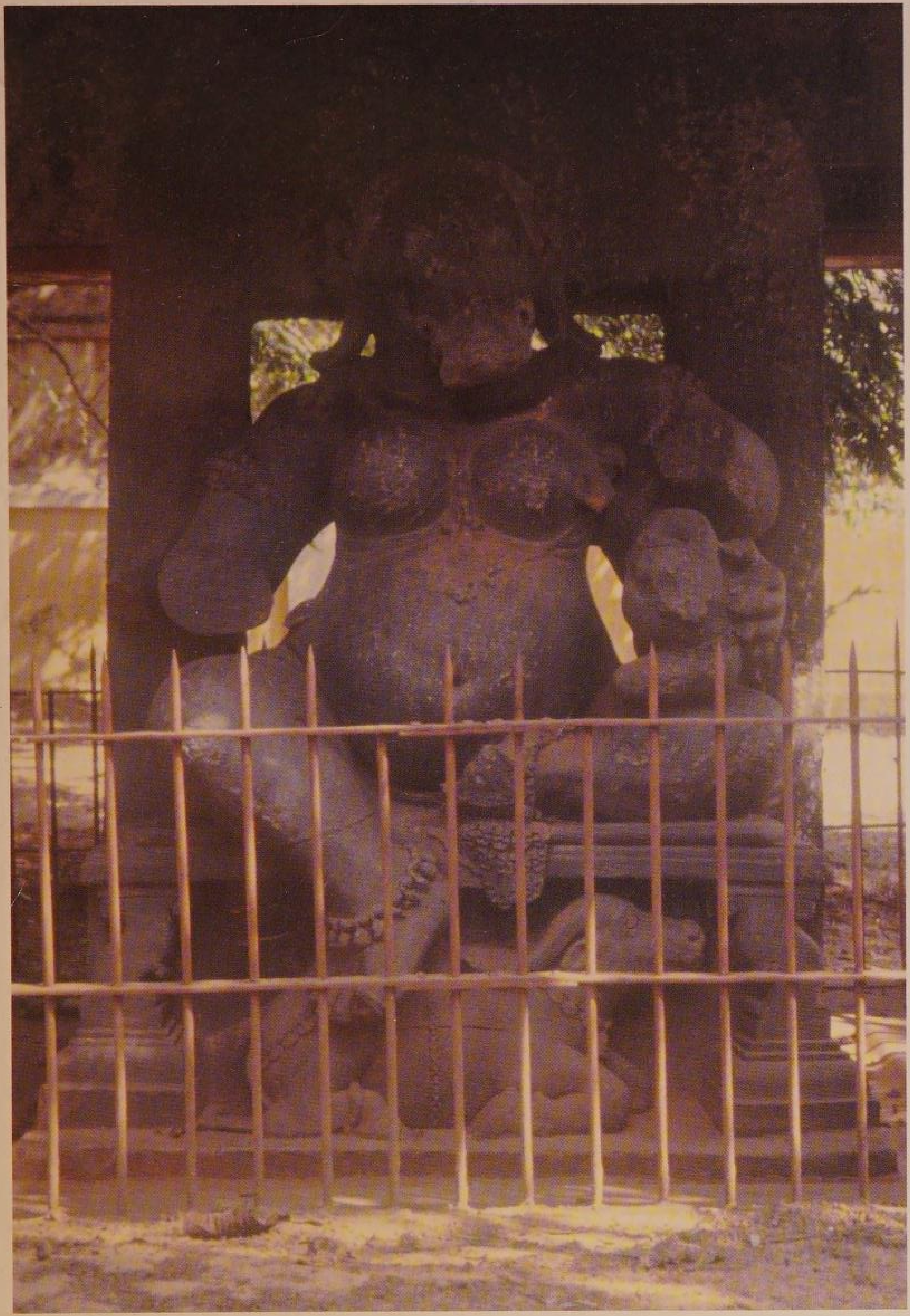
Pl. IV: Cāmuṇḍā; Trilocaneśvara temple compound, Jajpur, eighth or ninth century.



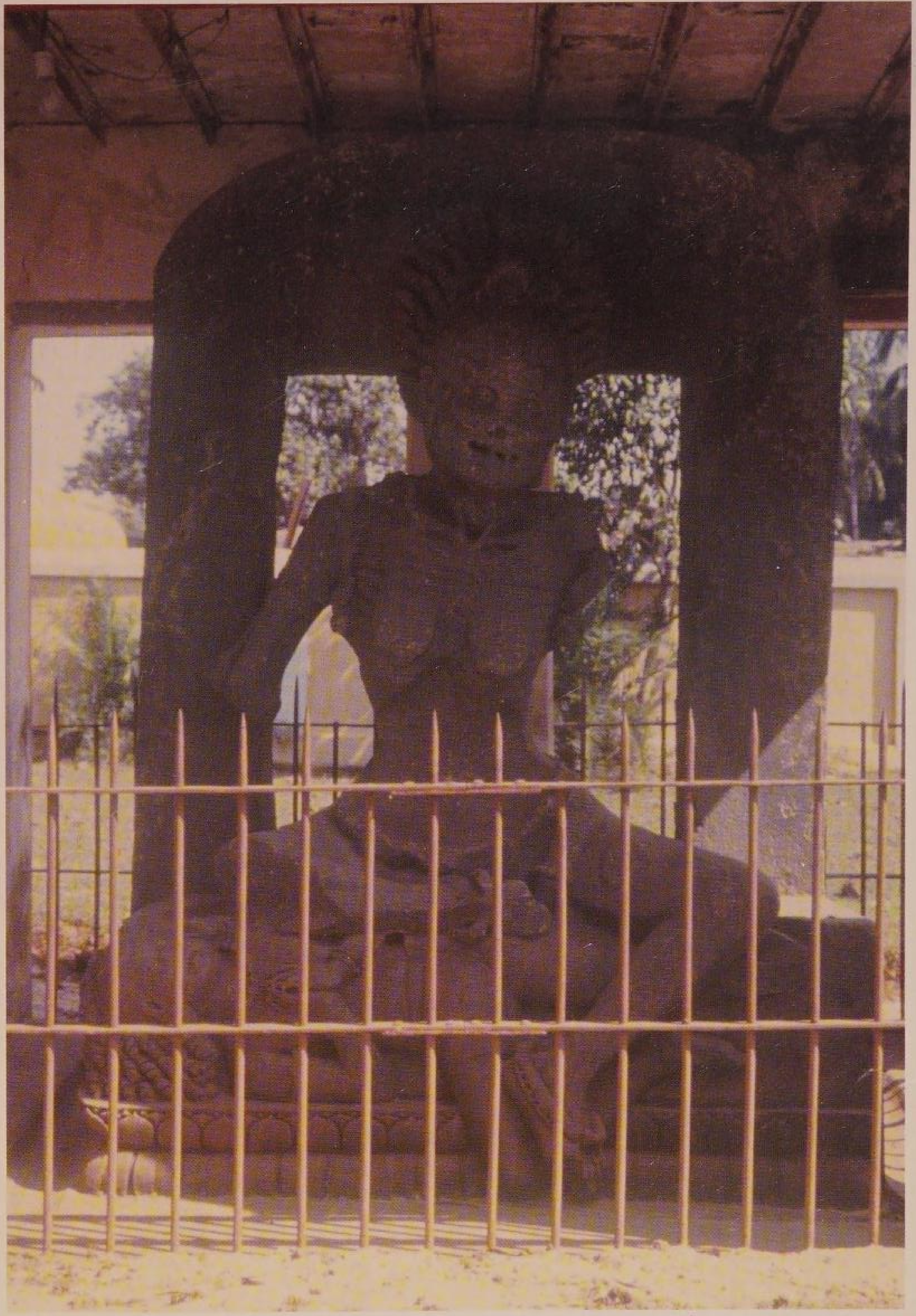
Pl. V: Cāmuṇḍā (or, perhaps, Bhairava); Trilocaneśvara temple compound, Jajpur, eighth century.



Pl. VI: Eighteen-armed Cāmuṇḍā; Trilocaneśvara temple compound, Jajpur, eighth or ninth century.

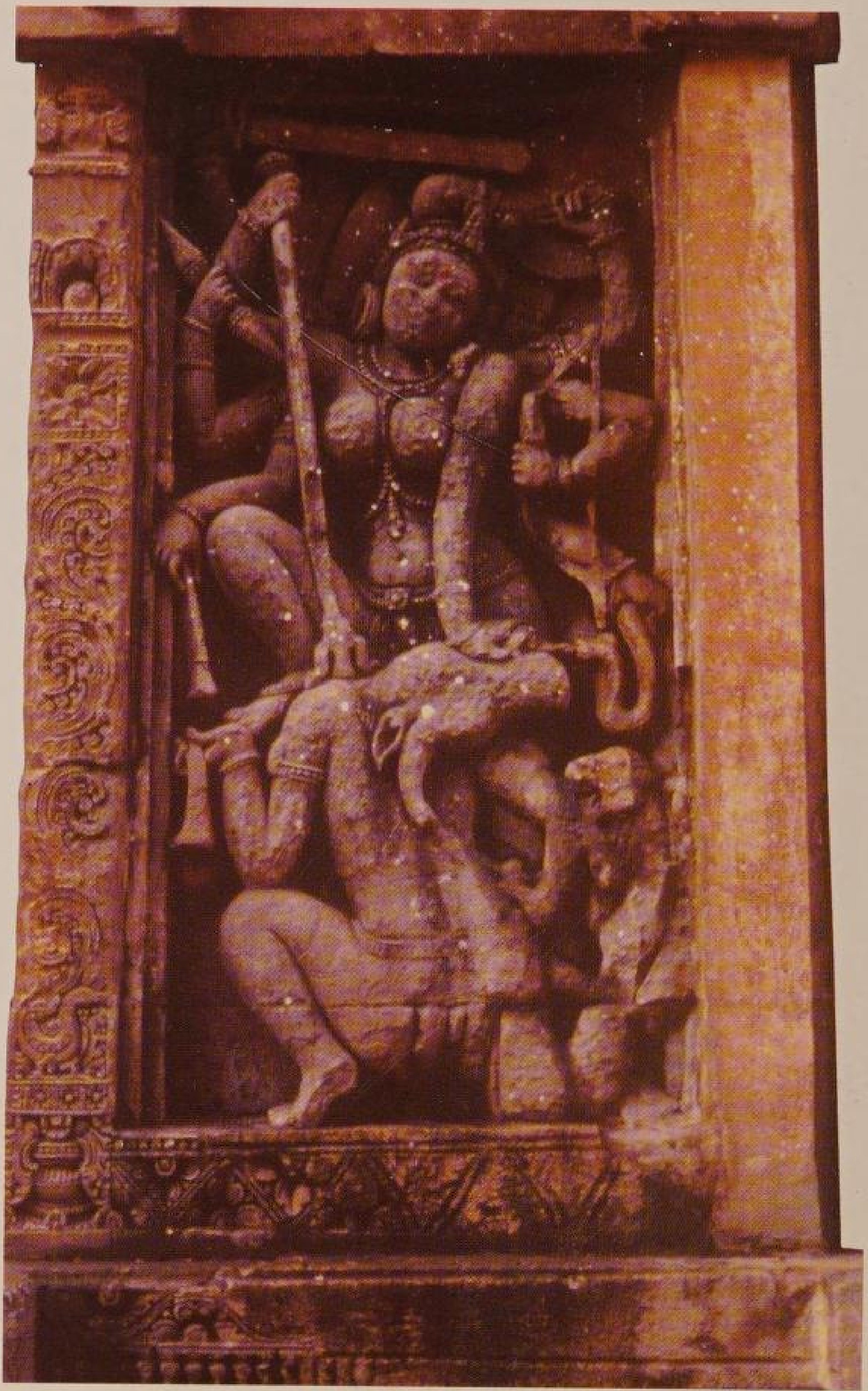


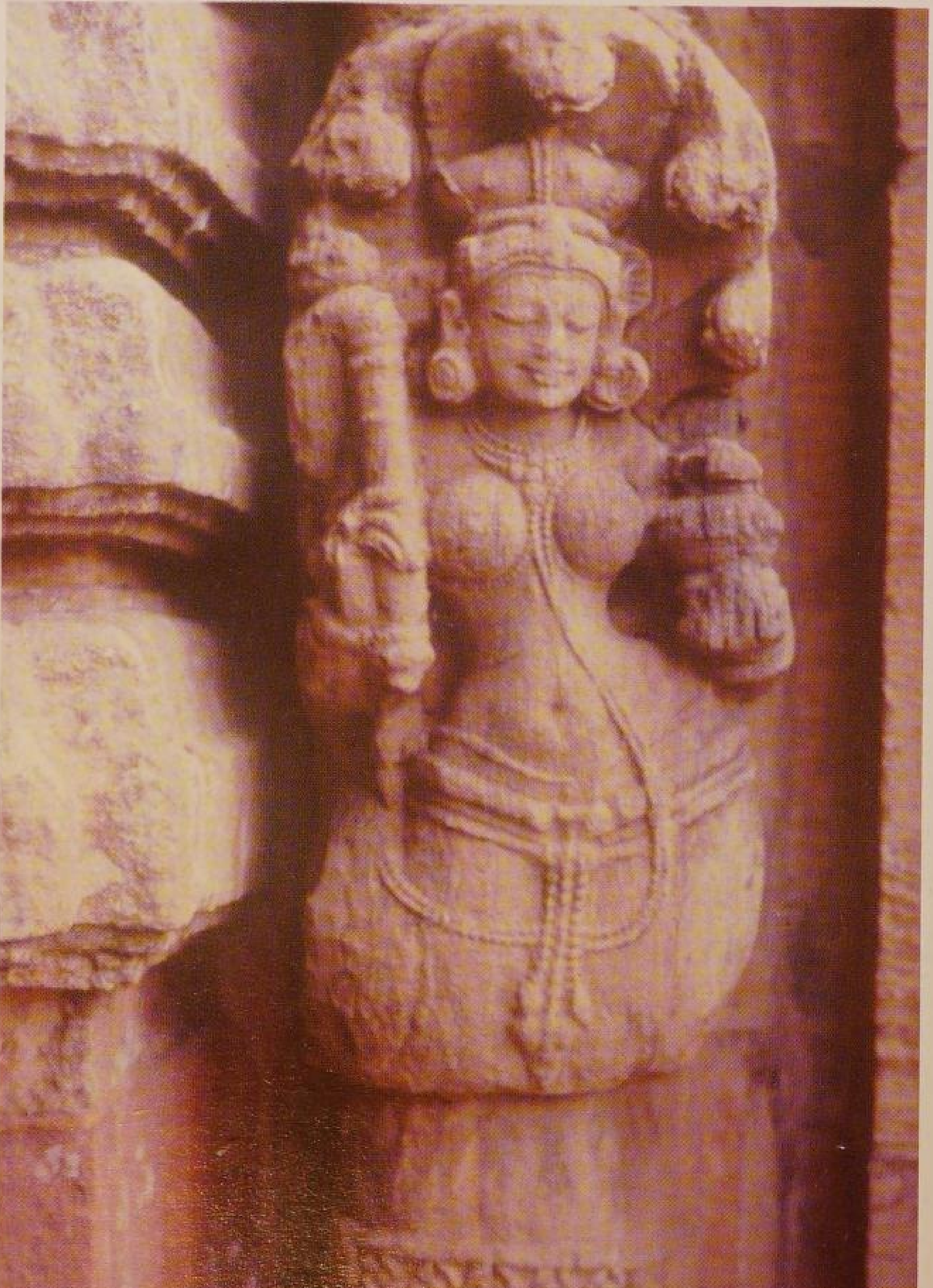
Pl. VII: Vārāhī; Sub-Divisional Officer compound, Jajpur, *c.* tenth century.



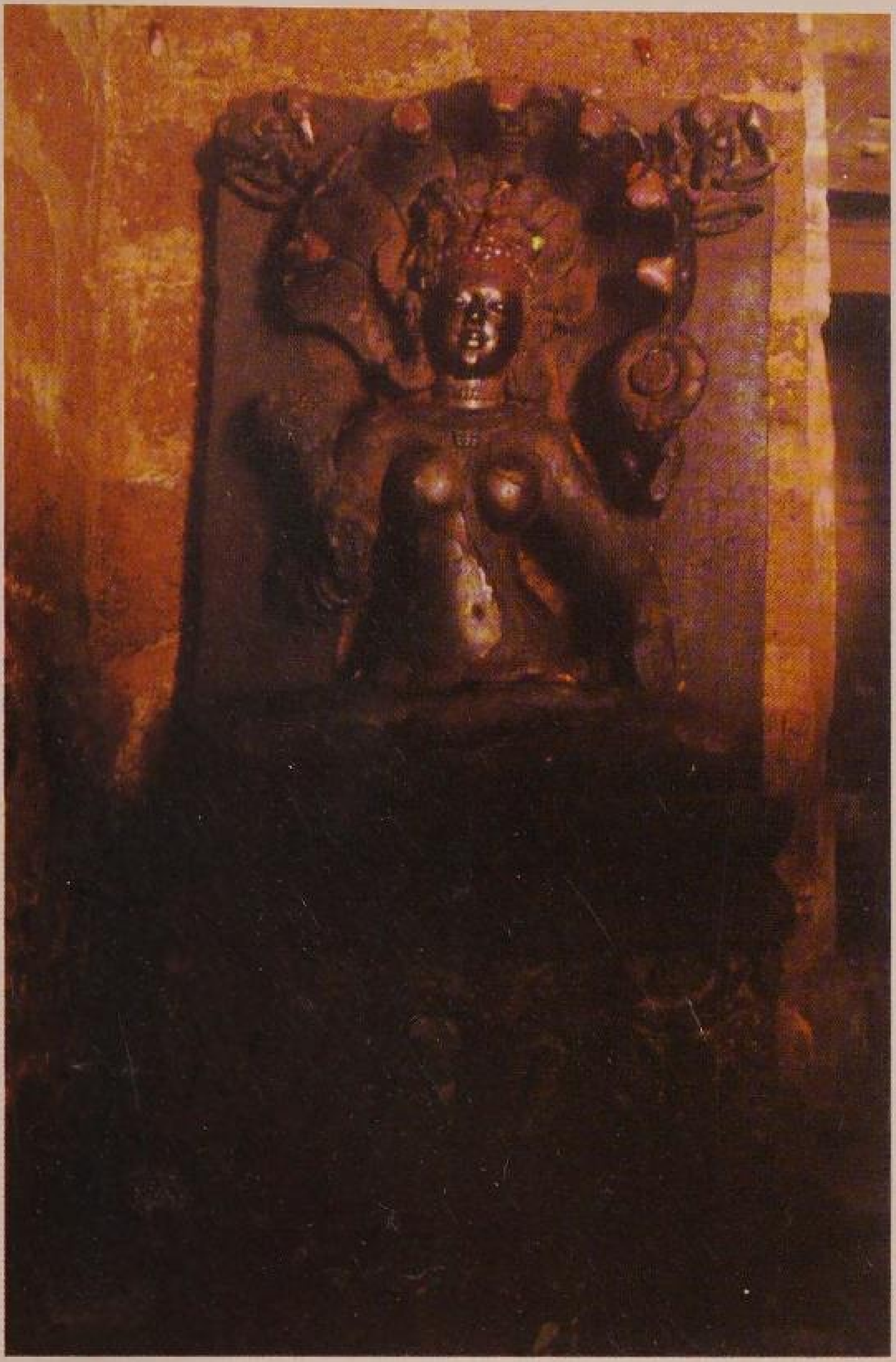
Pl. VIII: Cāmuṇḍā; Sub-Divisional Officer compound, Jajpur, *c.* tenth century.

Pl. IX: Mahiṣamardinī; Vaitāl Deul,
Bhubaneswar, eighth century.

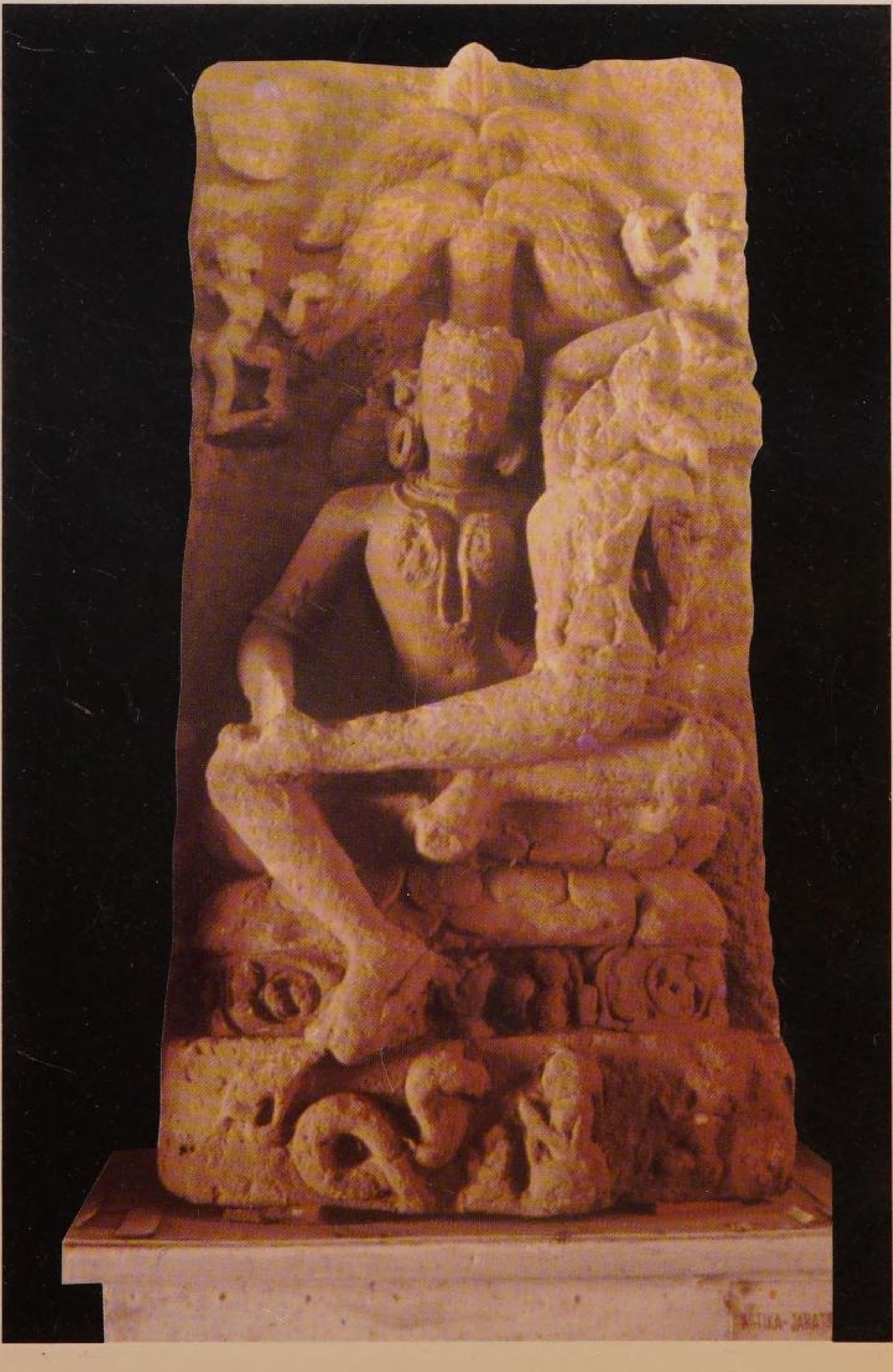




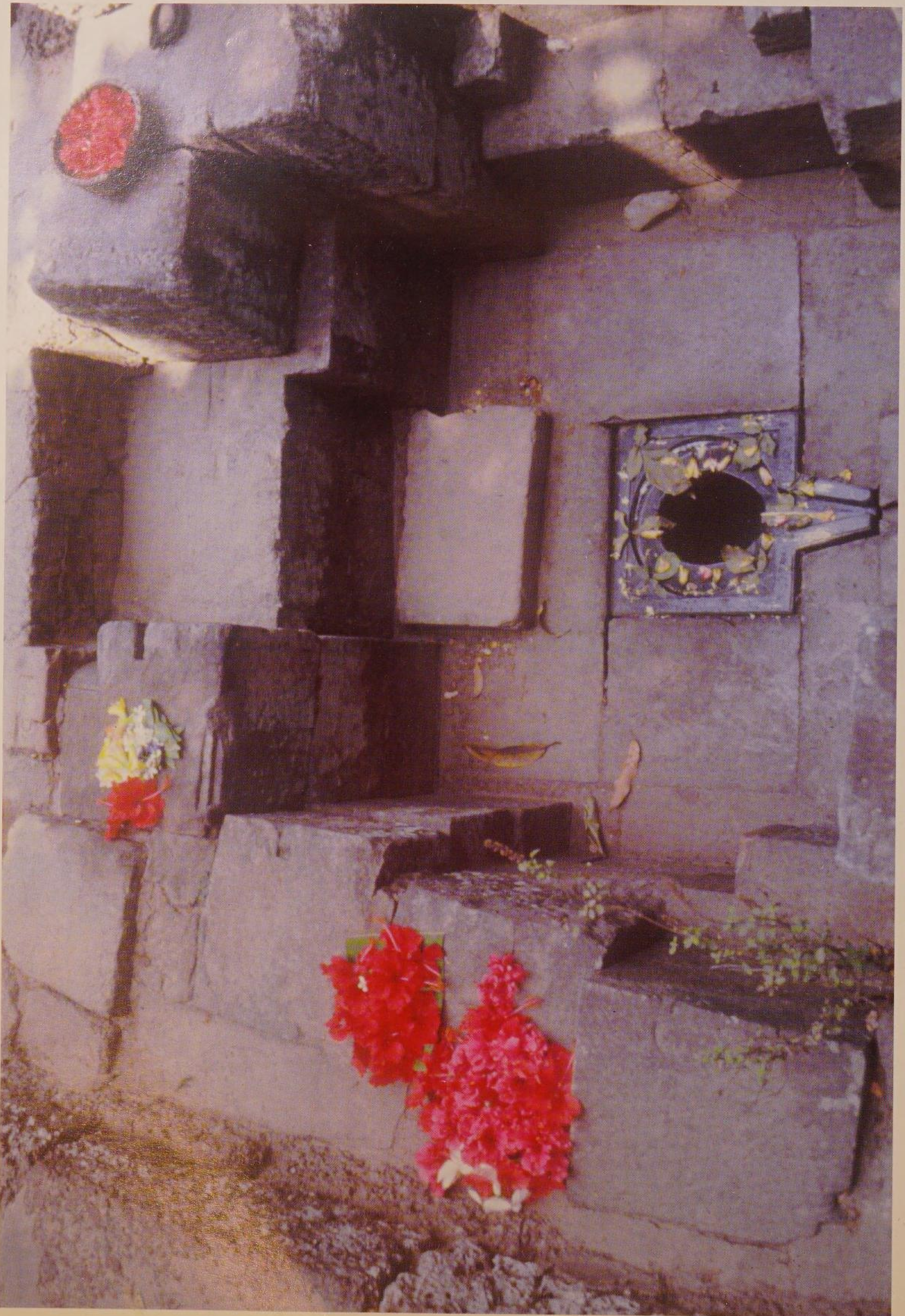
Pl. X: *Nāgī-stambha*; Megheśvara temple,
Bhubaneswar, late twelfth century.



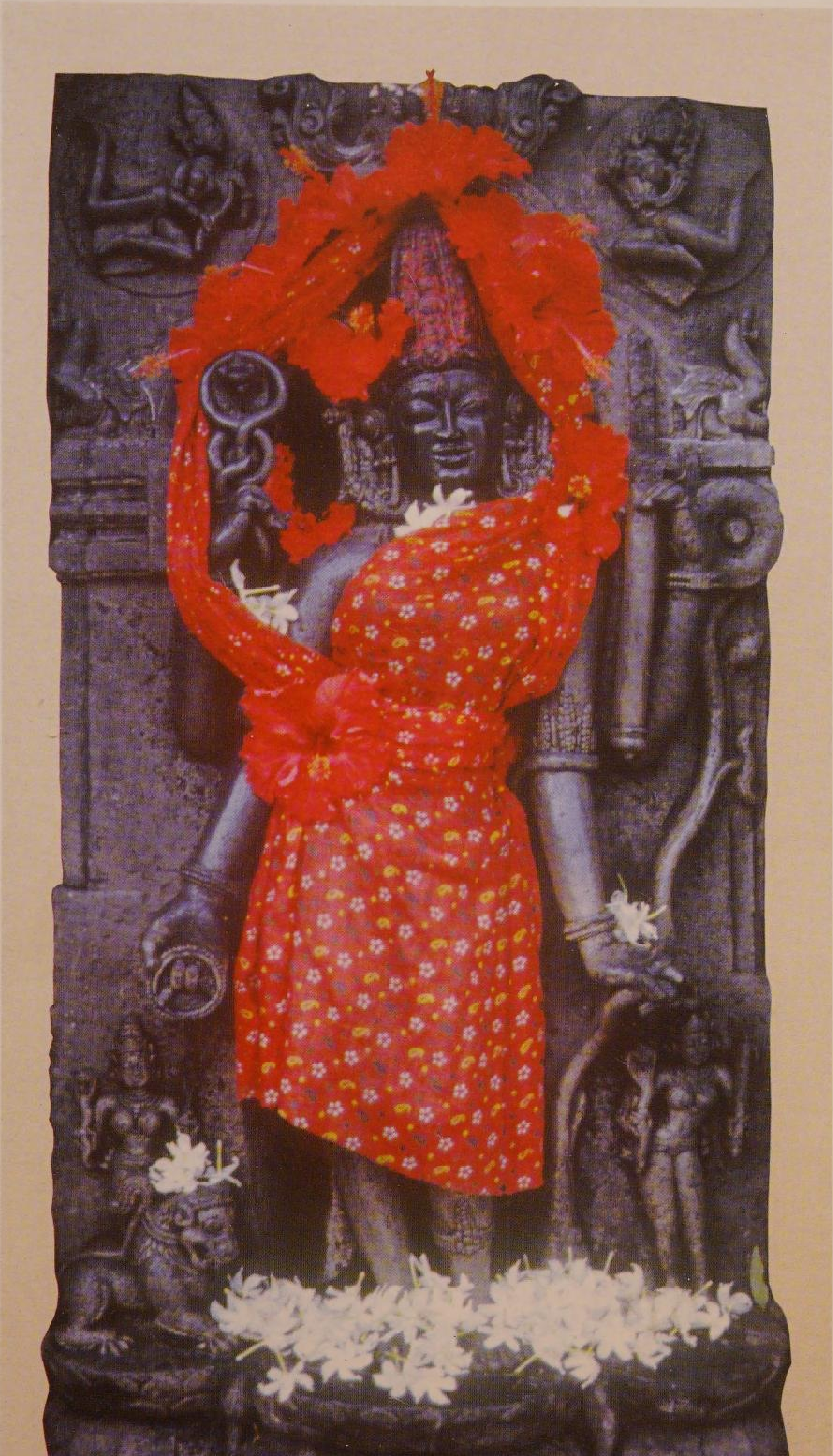
Pl. XI: Manasā (or, perhaps, the Buddhist serpent-goddess Jaṅgulī); Caṇḍī temple, Kenduli; datation uncertain.



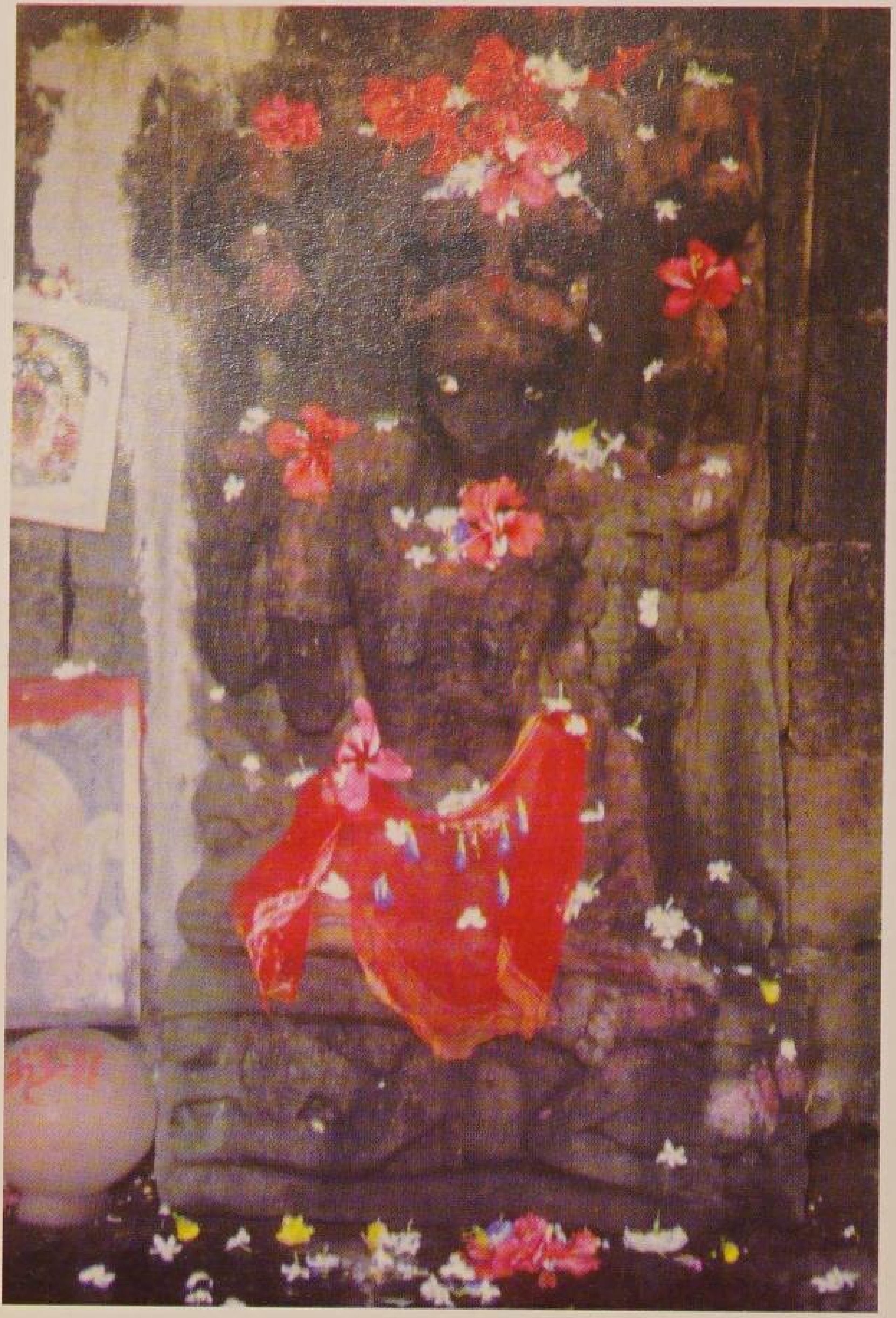
Pl. XII: Manasā/Jaratkāru; Jayadeva Cultural Centre, Kenduli, twelfth or thirteenth century.



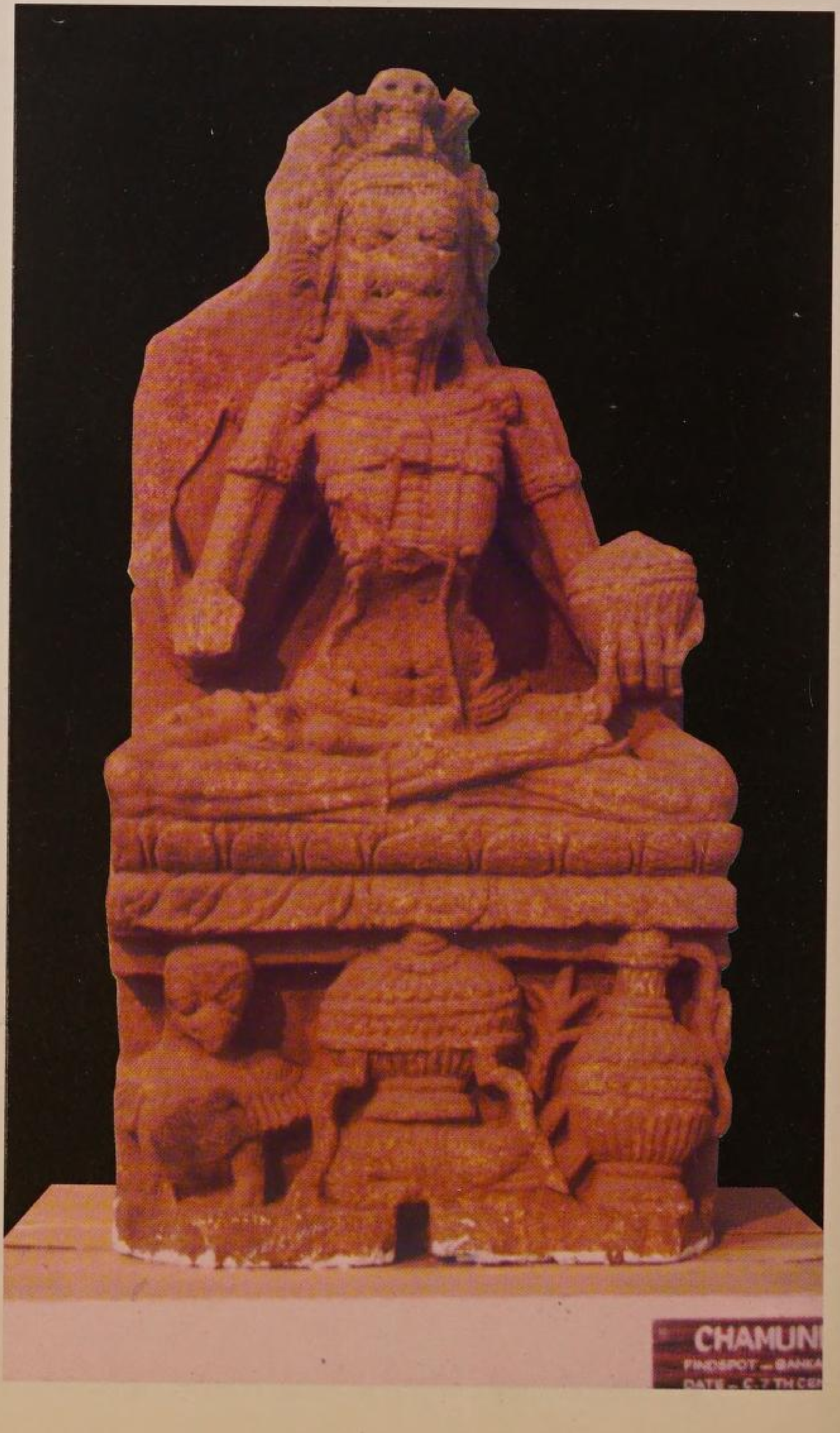
Pl. XIII: *Yoni* without *liṅga*; Caṇḍī temple, Kenduli.



Pl. XIV: Pārvatī; Buddhanātha temple, Garedipanchana, thirteenth century.



Pl. XV: Cāmuṇḍā; Jāleśvara temple compound, Kalarahanga; datation uncertain.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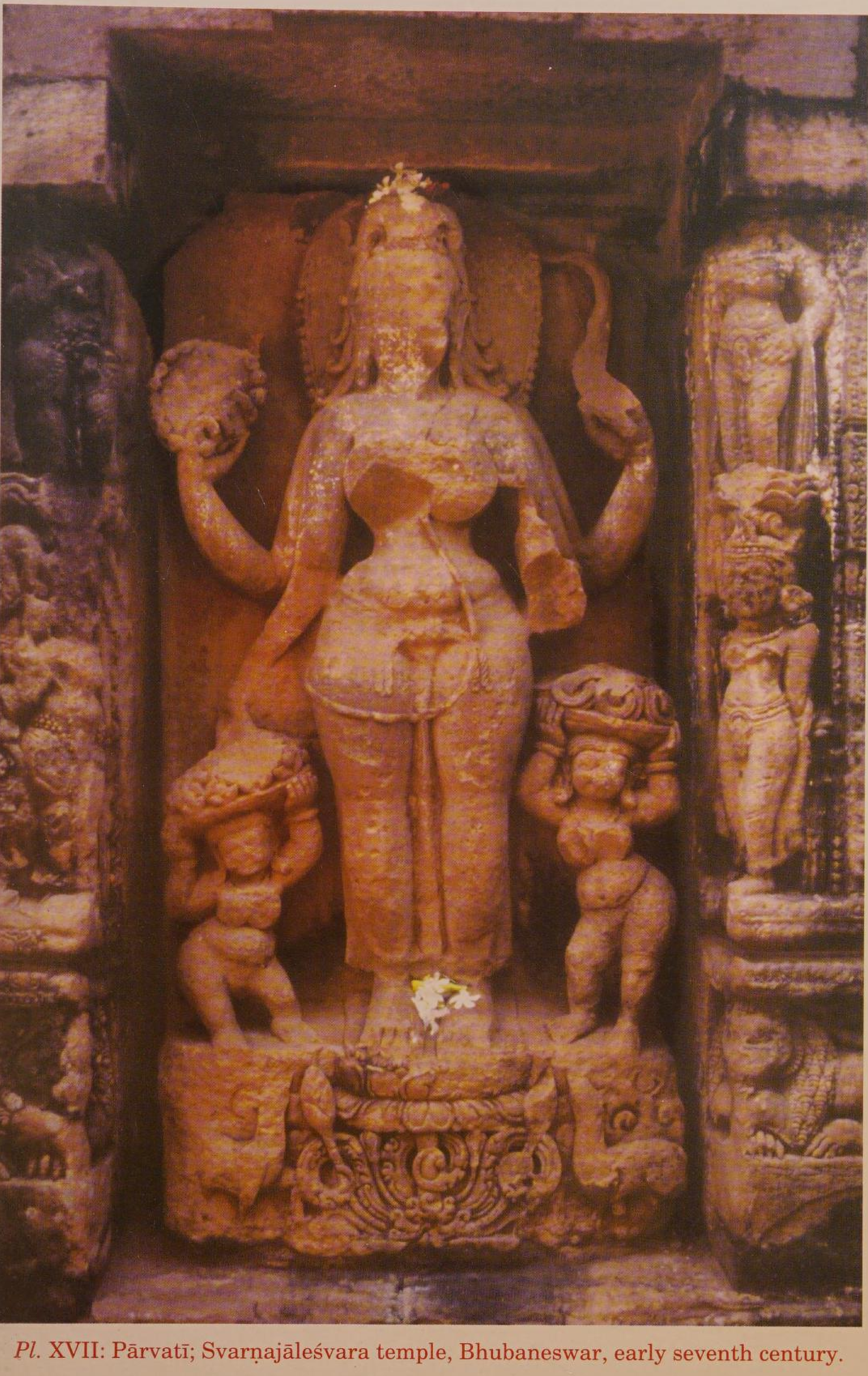
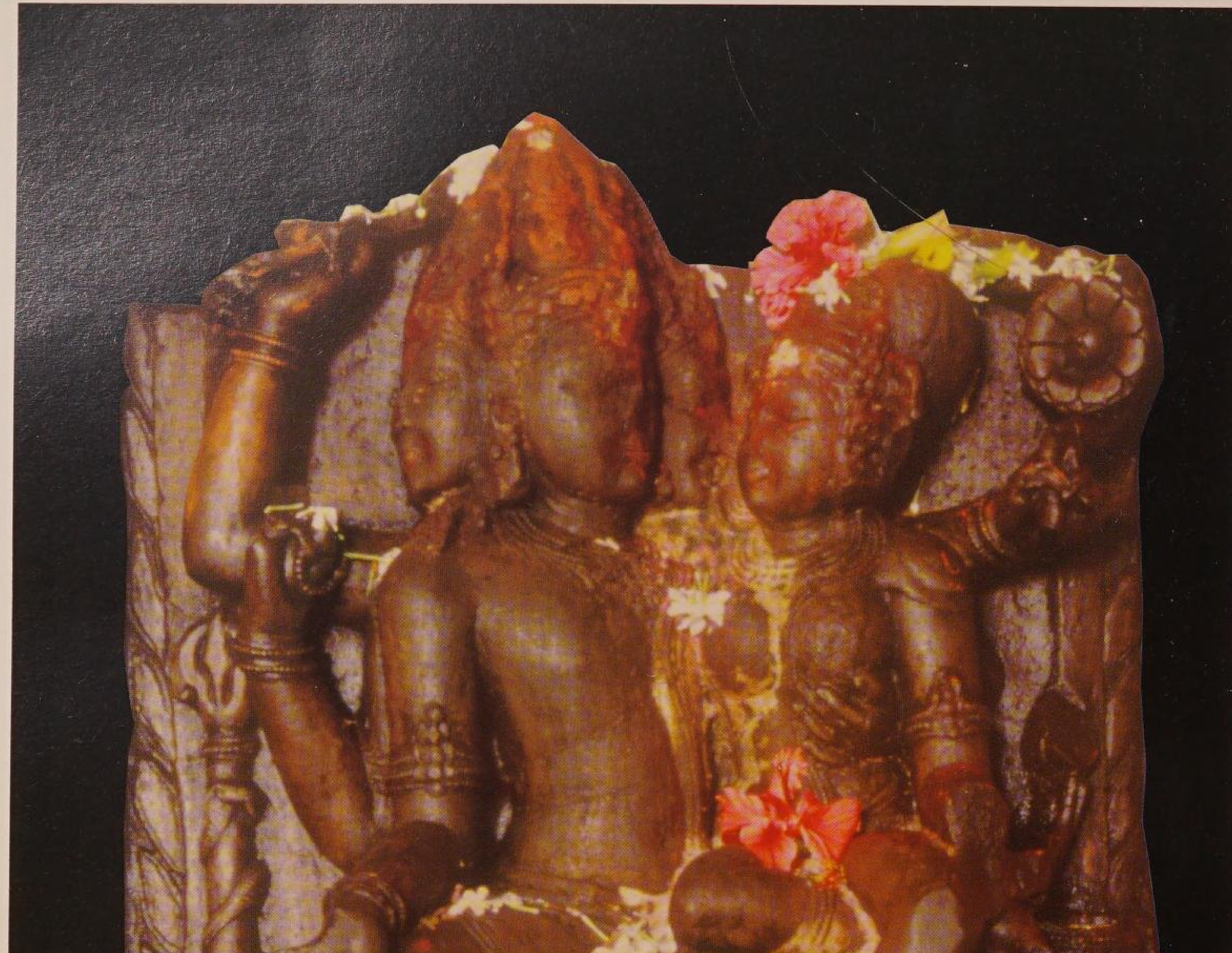
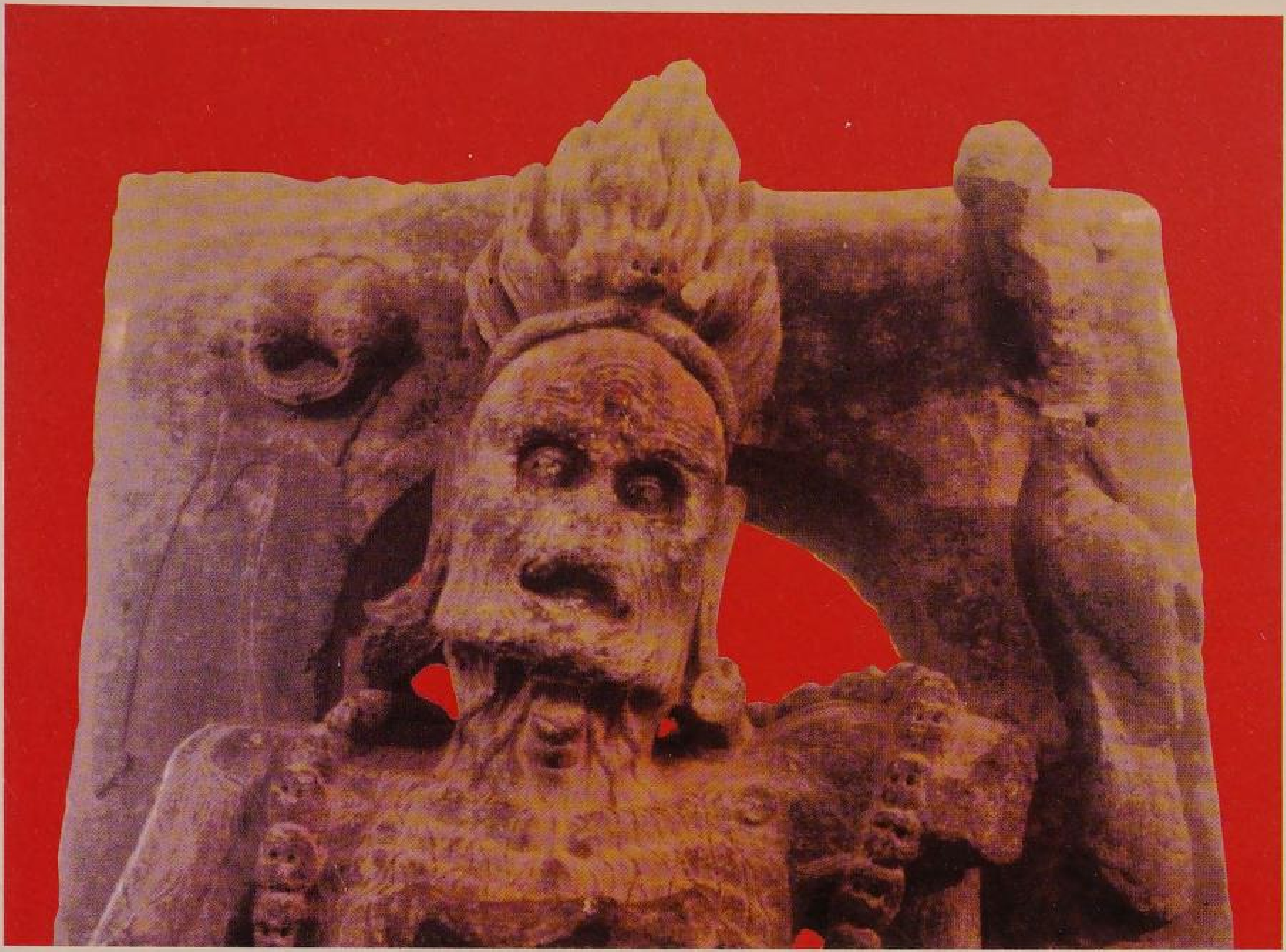
Pl. XVI: Cāmuṇḍā; from Bankada, Bhubaneswar, *c*. seventh century.



Pl. XVII: Pārvatī; Svarṇajāleśvara temple, Bhubaneswar, early seventh century.

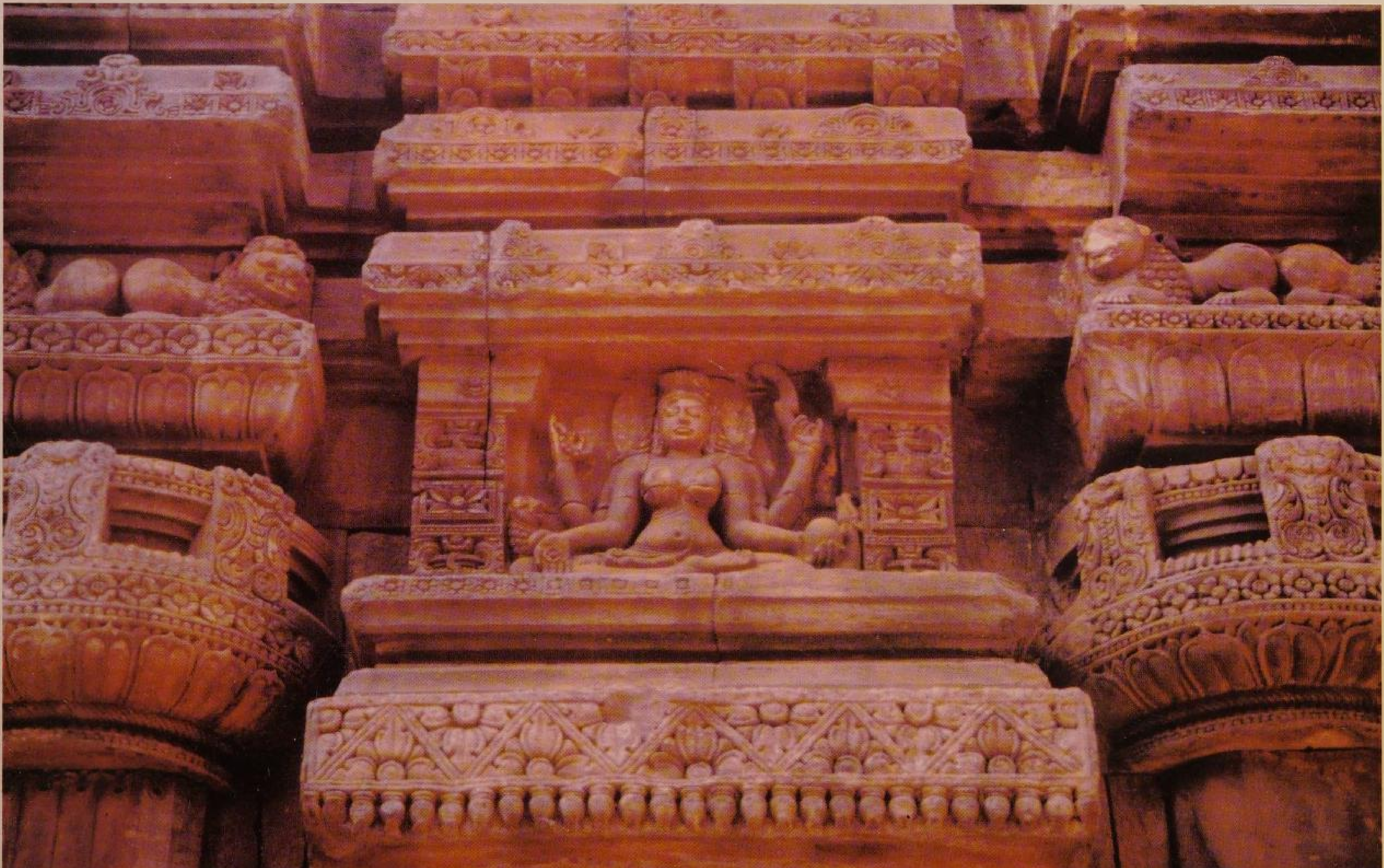


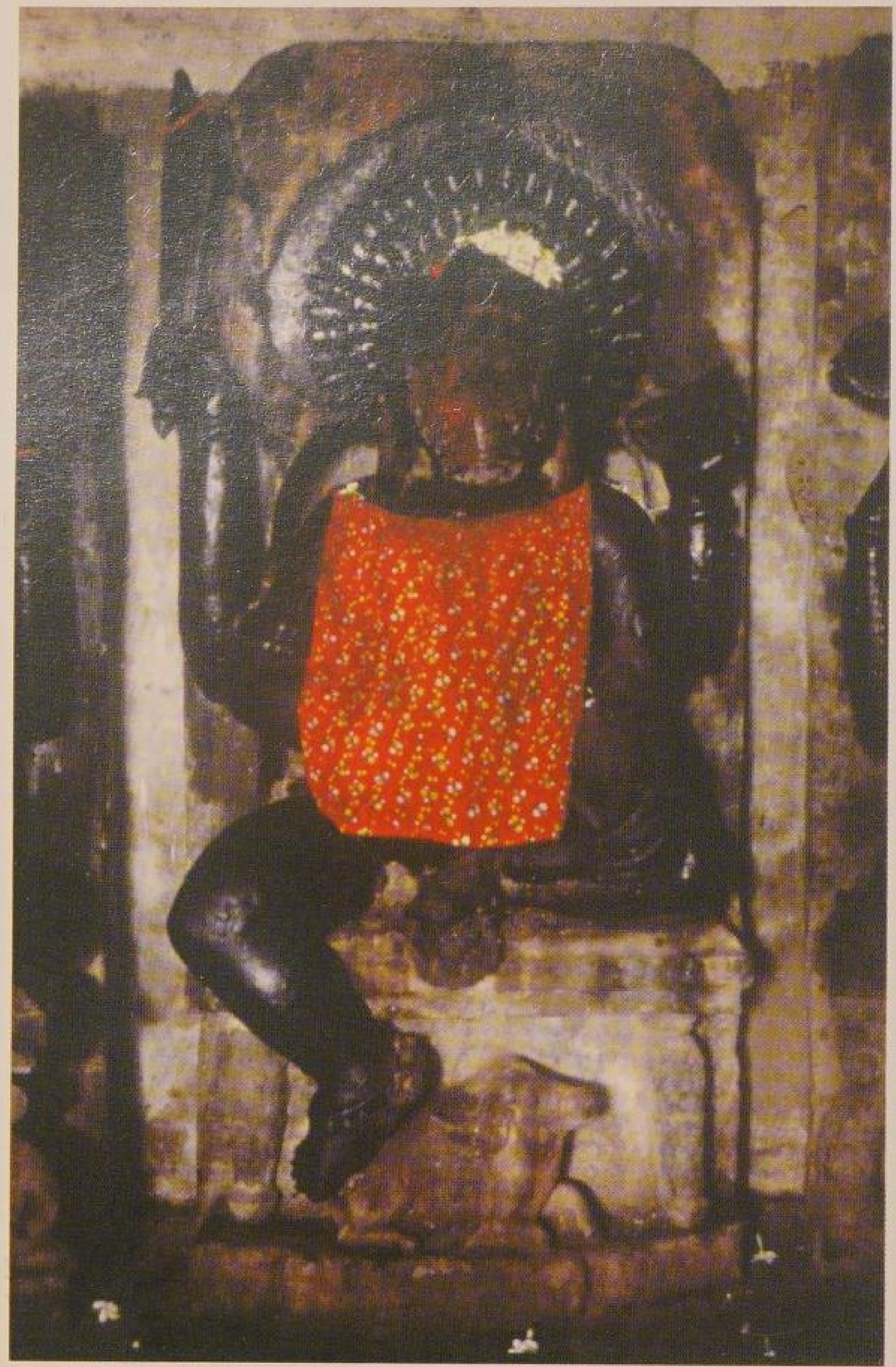
Pl. XVIII: Umāmaheśvaramūrti; Megheśvara temple, Bhubaneswar, late twelfth century.



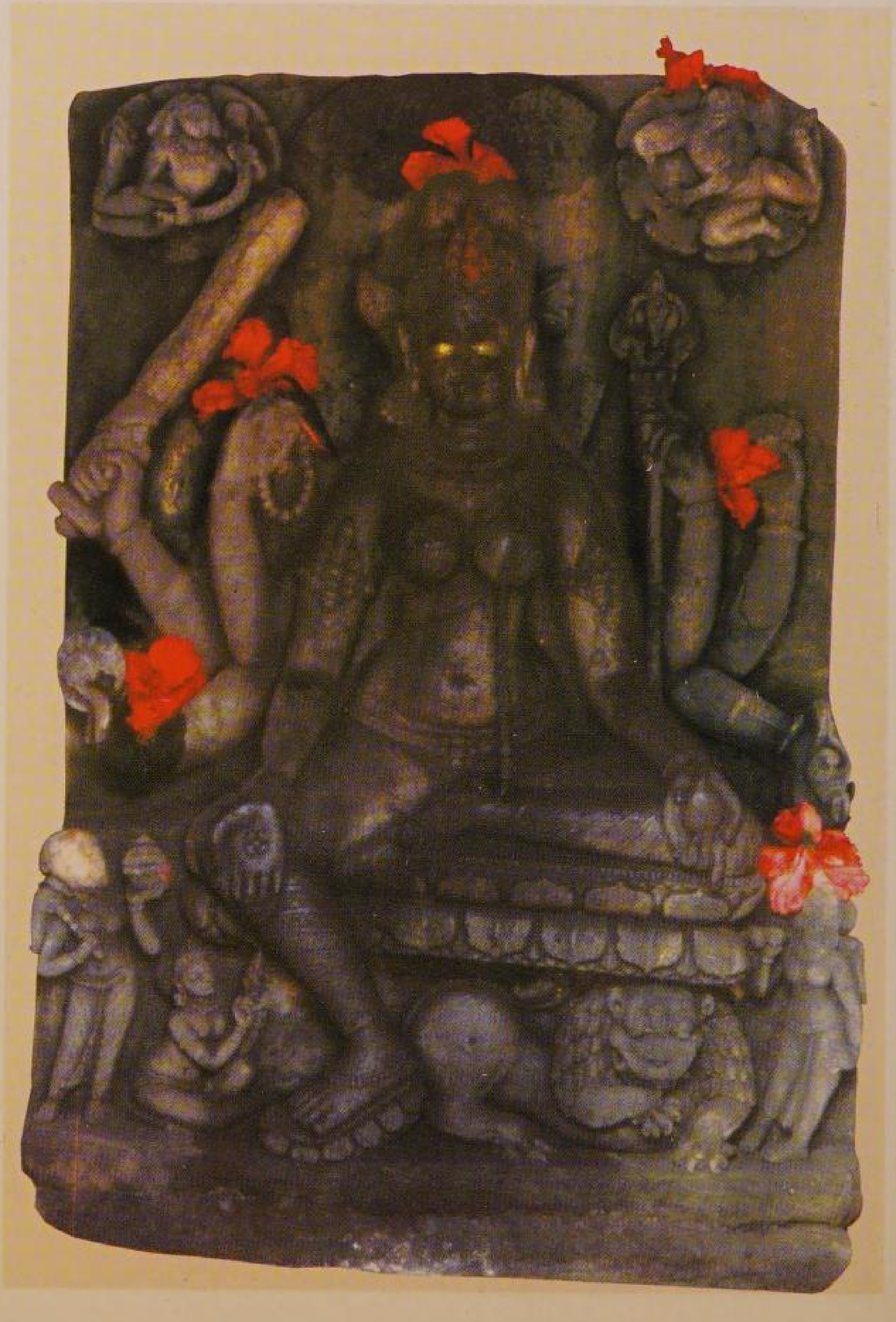
Pl. XIX: Cāmuṇḍā; from Dharmasala, Bhubaneswar; datation uncertain.

Pl. XX: Durgā; Vaitāl Deul, Bhubaneswar, eighth century.

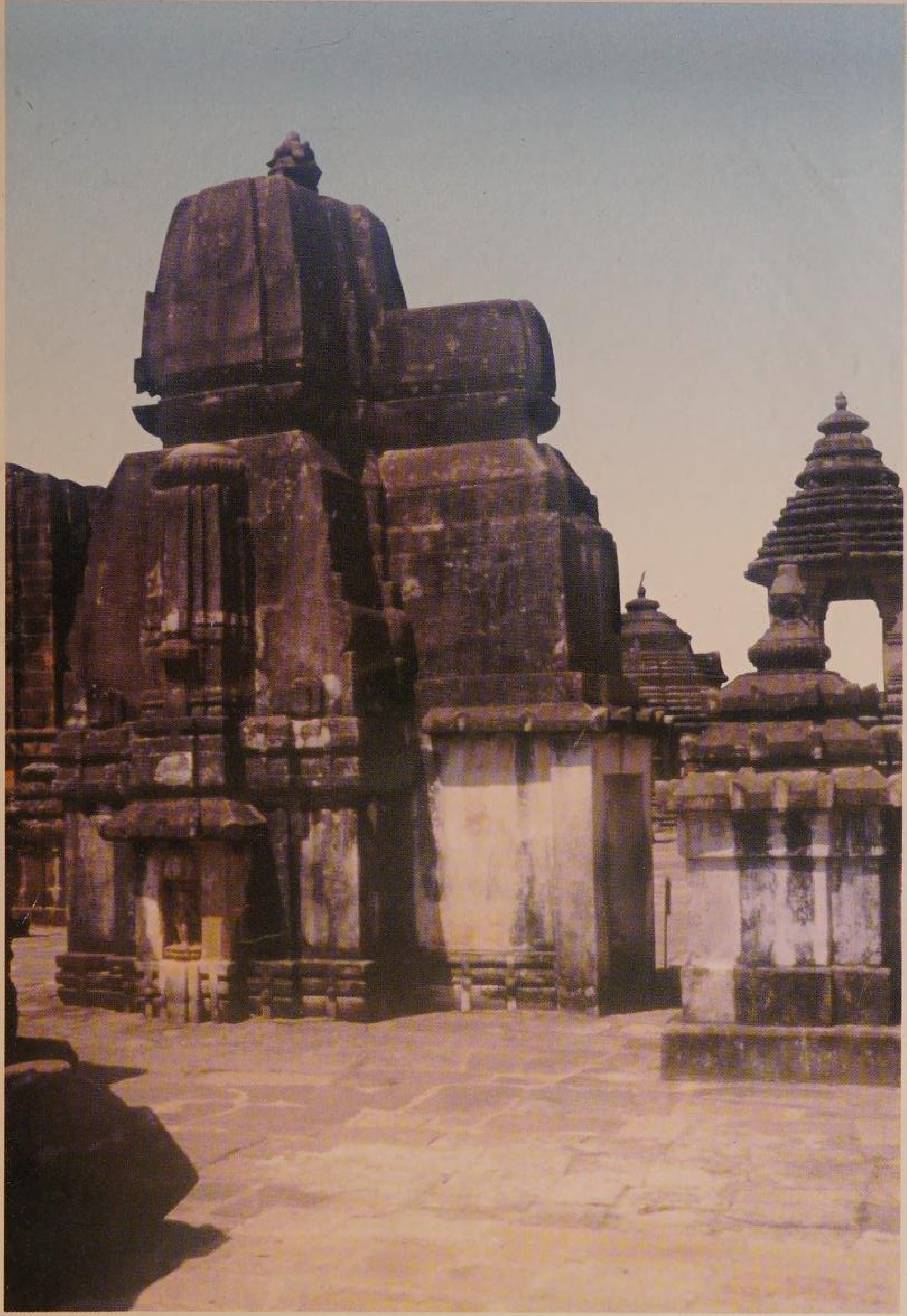




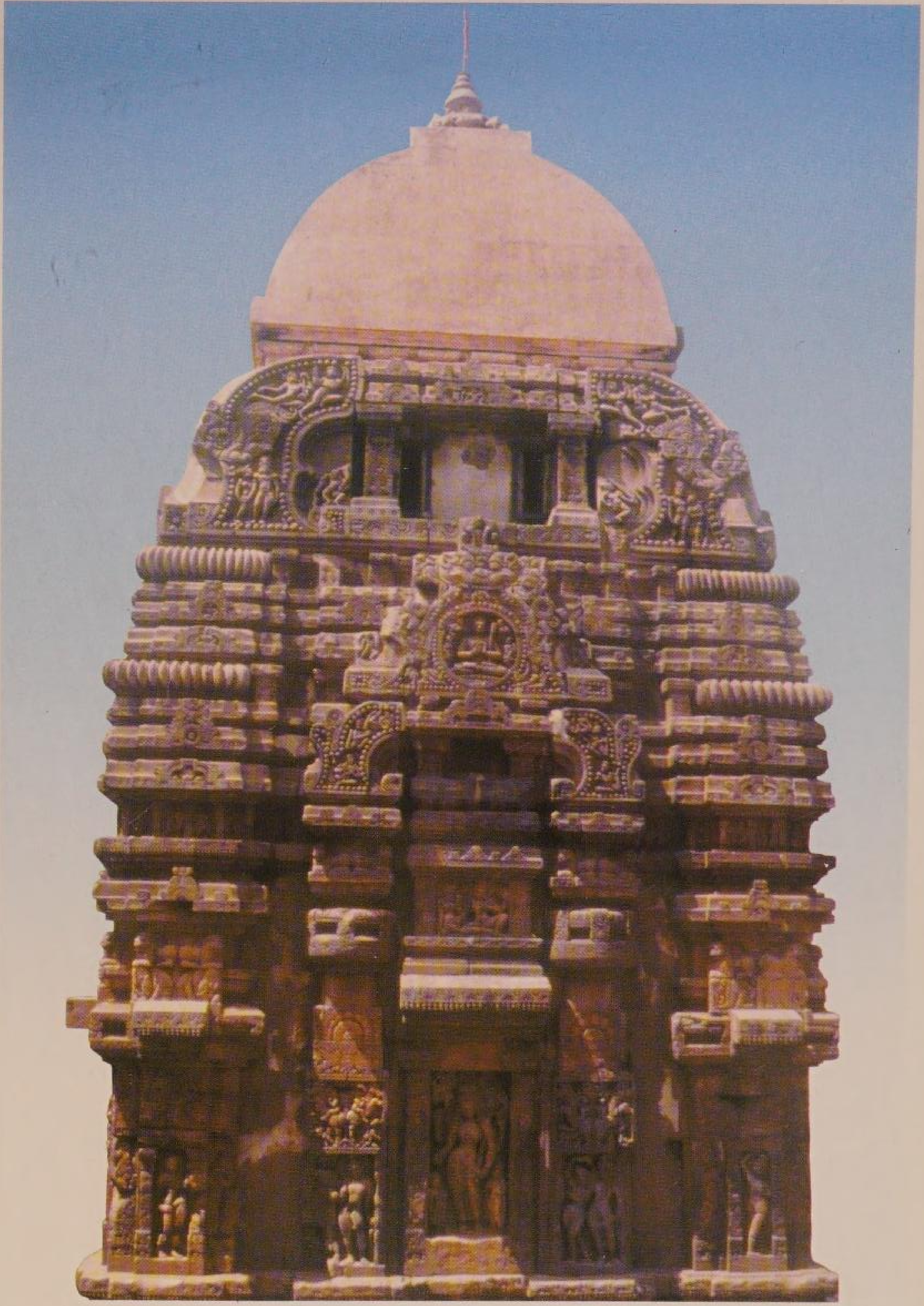
Pl. XXI: Vārāhī; from the Saptamātr̥kā set in the Mārkaṇḍeśvara temple compound, Puri, *c*. tenth century.



Pl. XXII: Siṁhavāhinī Durgā; Maṇikeśvarī Bhagavatī temple compound, Suklesvara, ninth century.

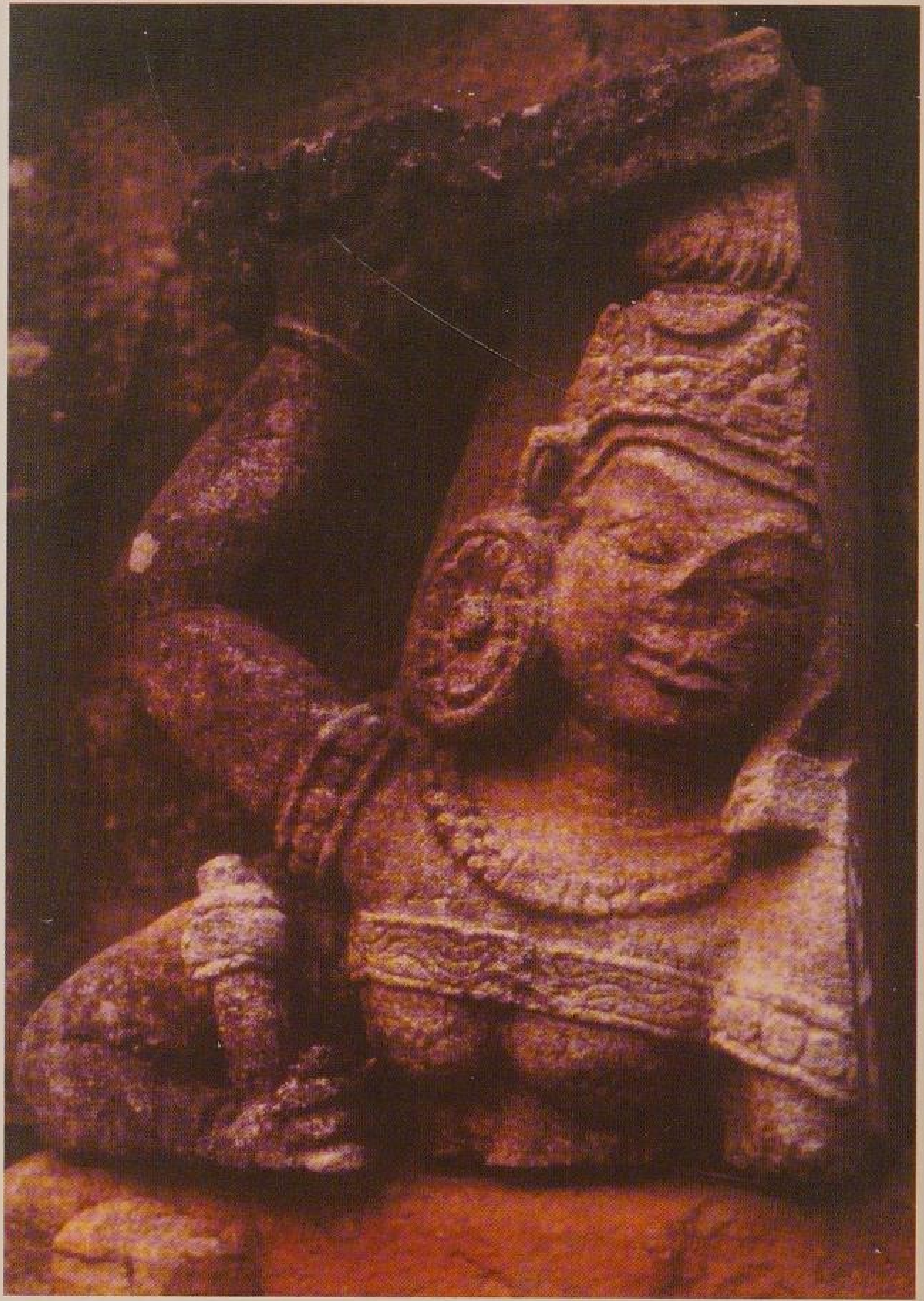


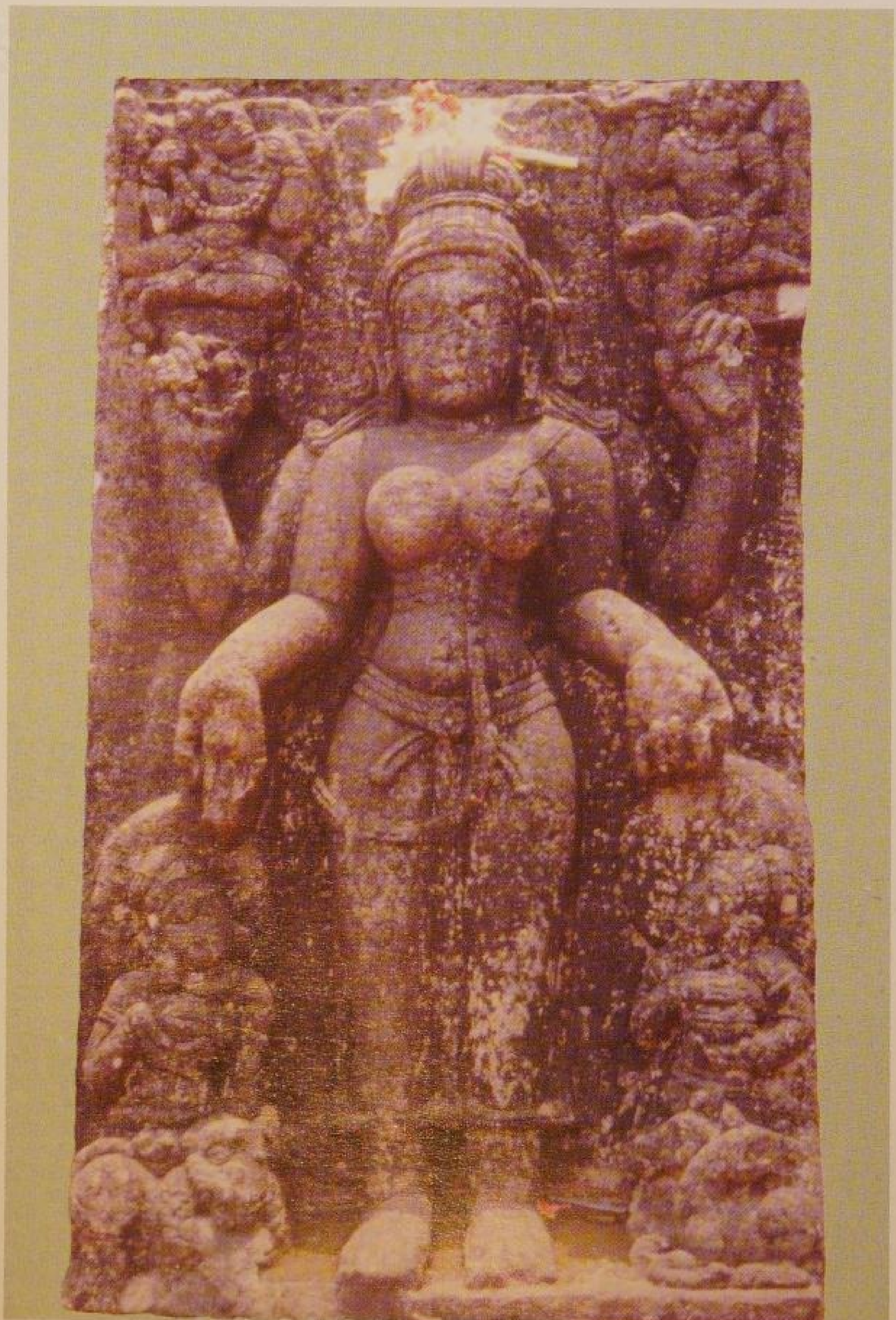
Pl. XXIII: Sāvitrī temple; Liṅgarāja temple complex, Bhubaneswar, early twelfth century.



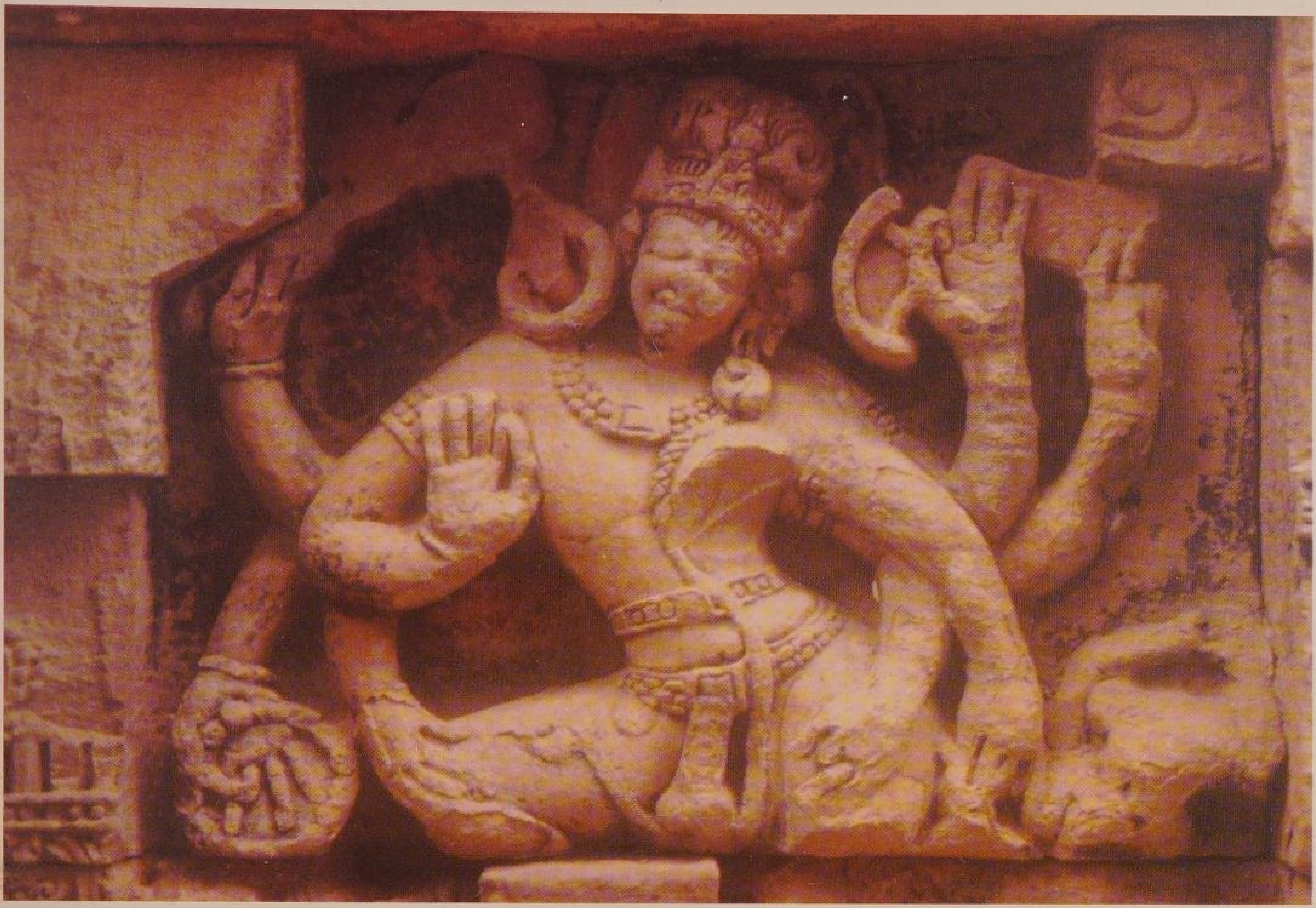
Pl. XXIV:Vaitāl Deul; Bhubaneswar, eighth century.

Pl. XXV: Loose broken image of Mahiṣamardinī; Śatrughneśvara temple group, Bhubaneswar, late sixth century.



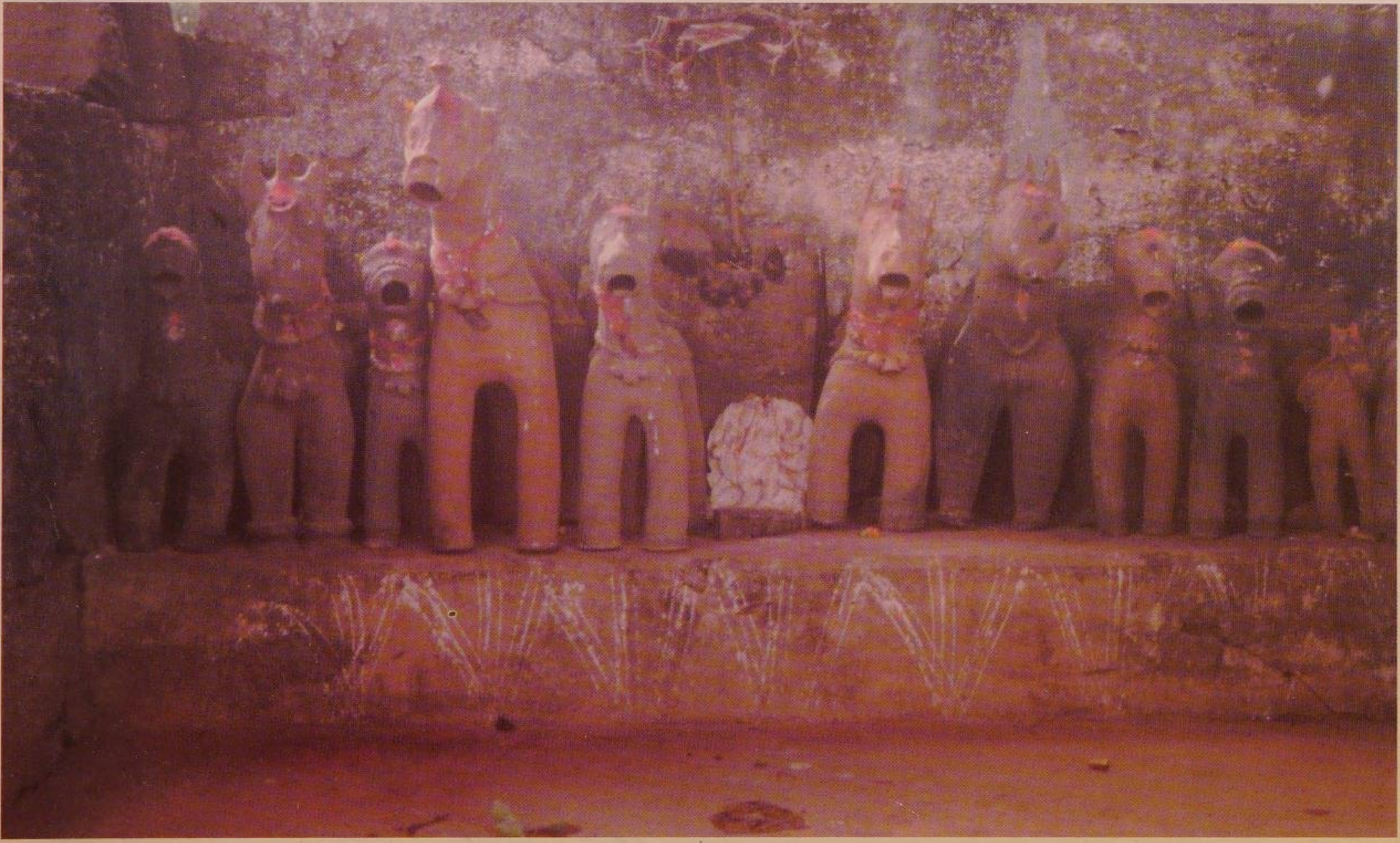


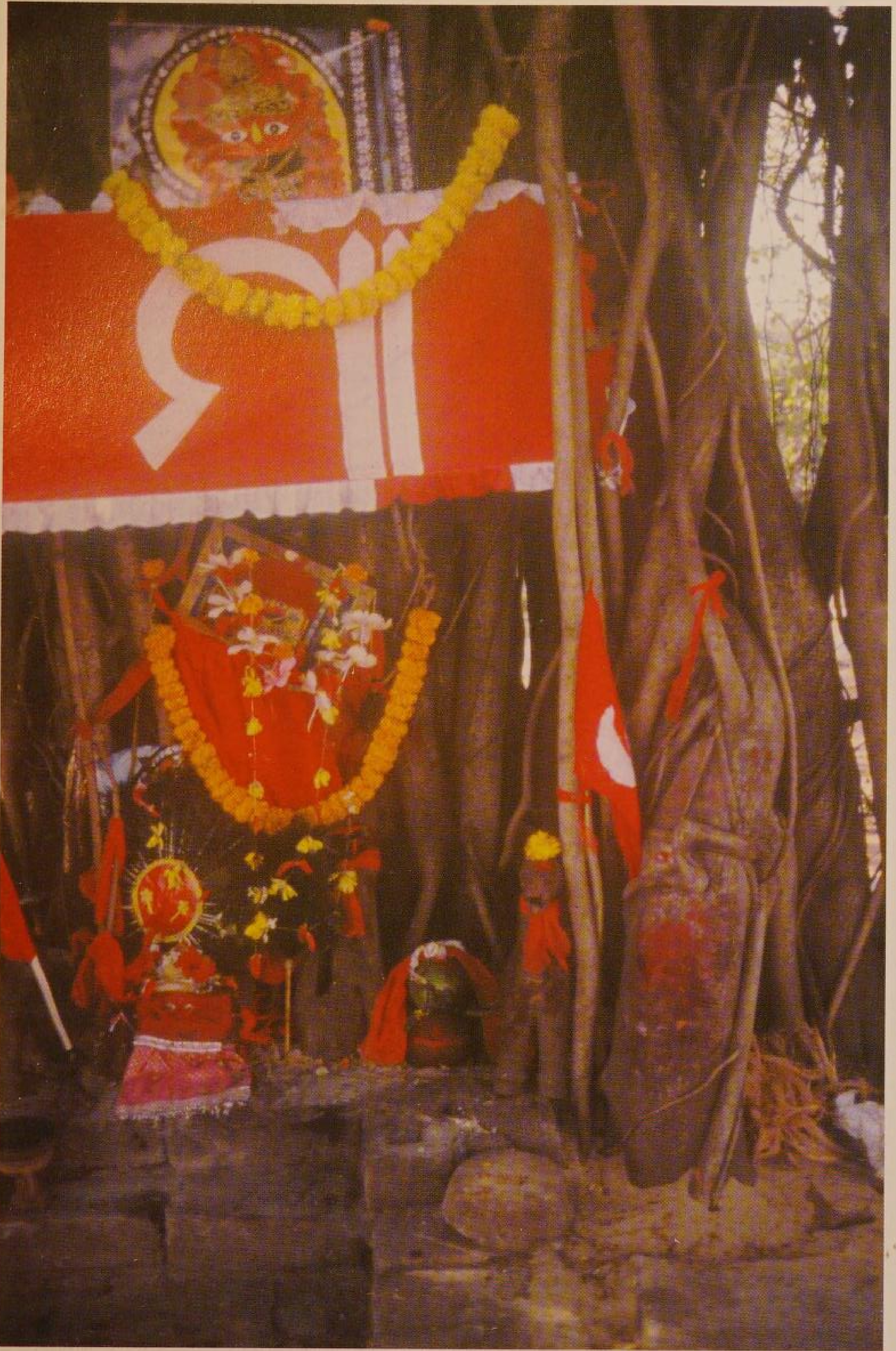
Pl. XXVI: Loose image of Pārvatī; ruined Paścimeśvara temple, Bhubaneswar, seventh century.



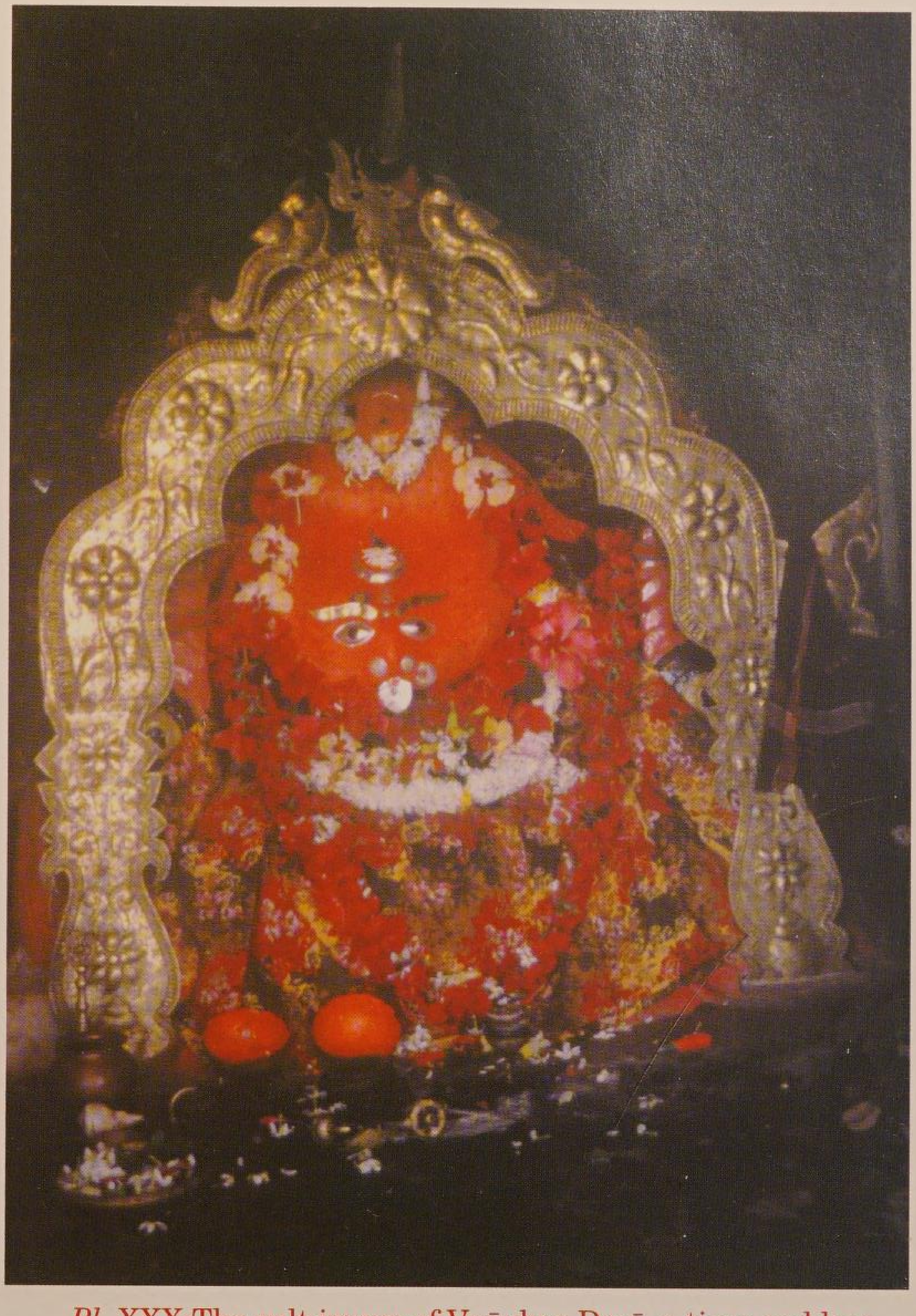
Pl. XXVII: Dancing Ardhanārīśvara; Paraśurāmeśvara temple, Bhubaneswar, seventh century.

Pl. XXVIII: *Mātāghoṛā*s (votive clay horses); Joranda.

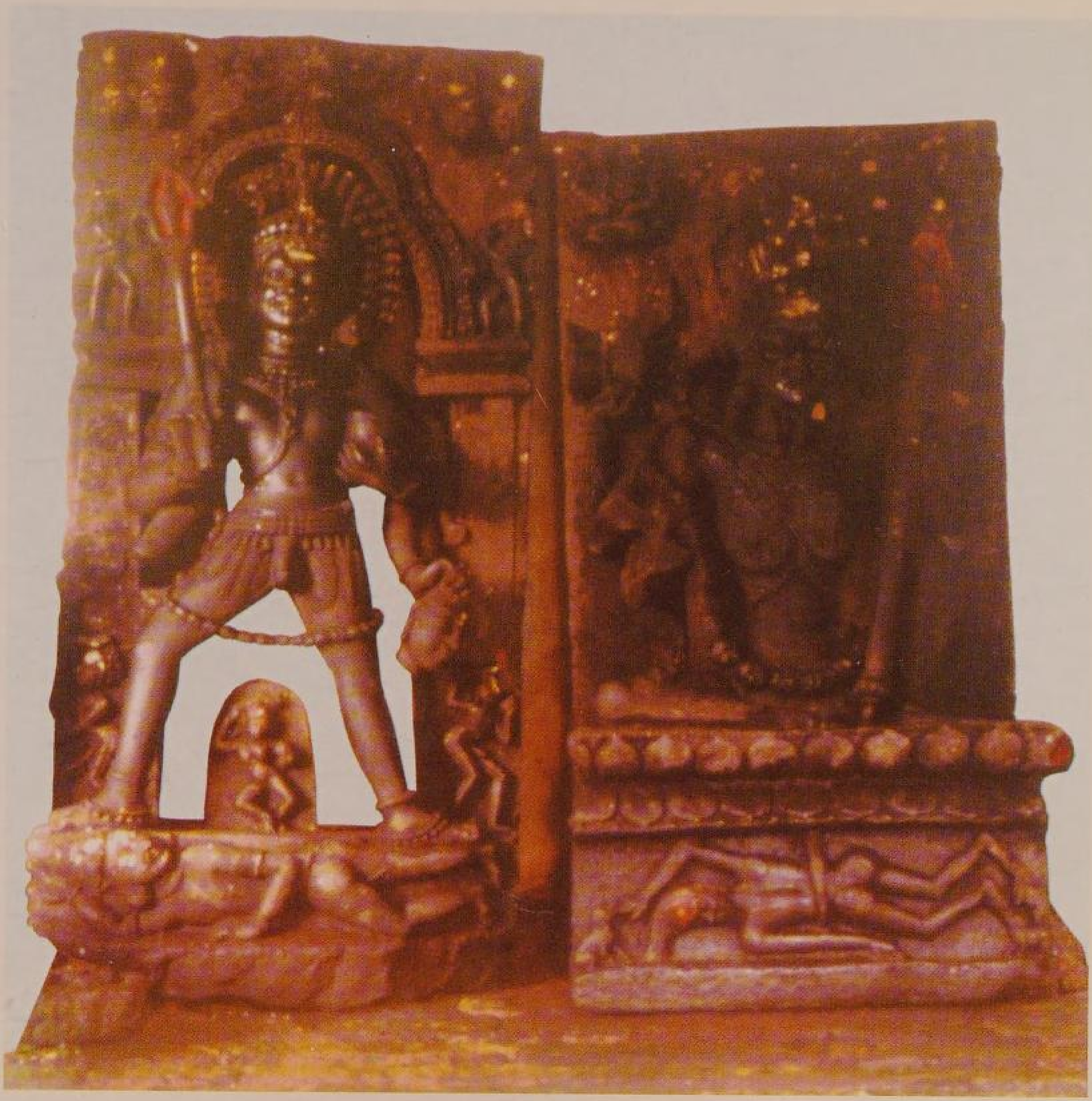




Pl. XXIX: *Yakṣī* worshipped as Mā Tāriṇī in
a banyan tree; Janpath, Bhubaneswar.

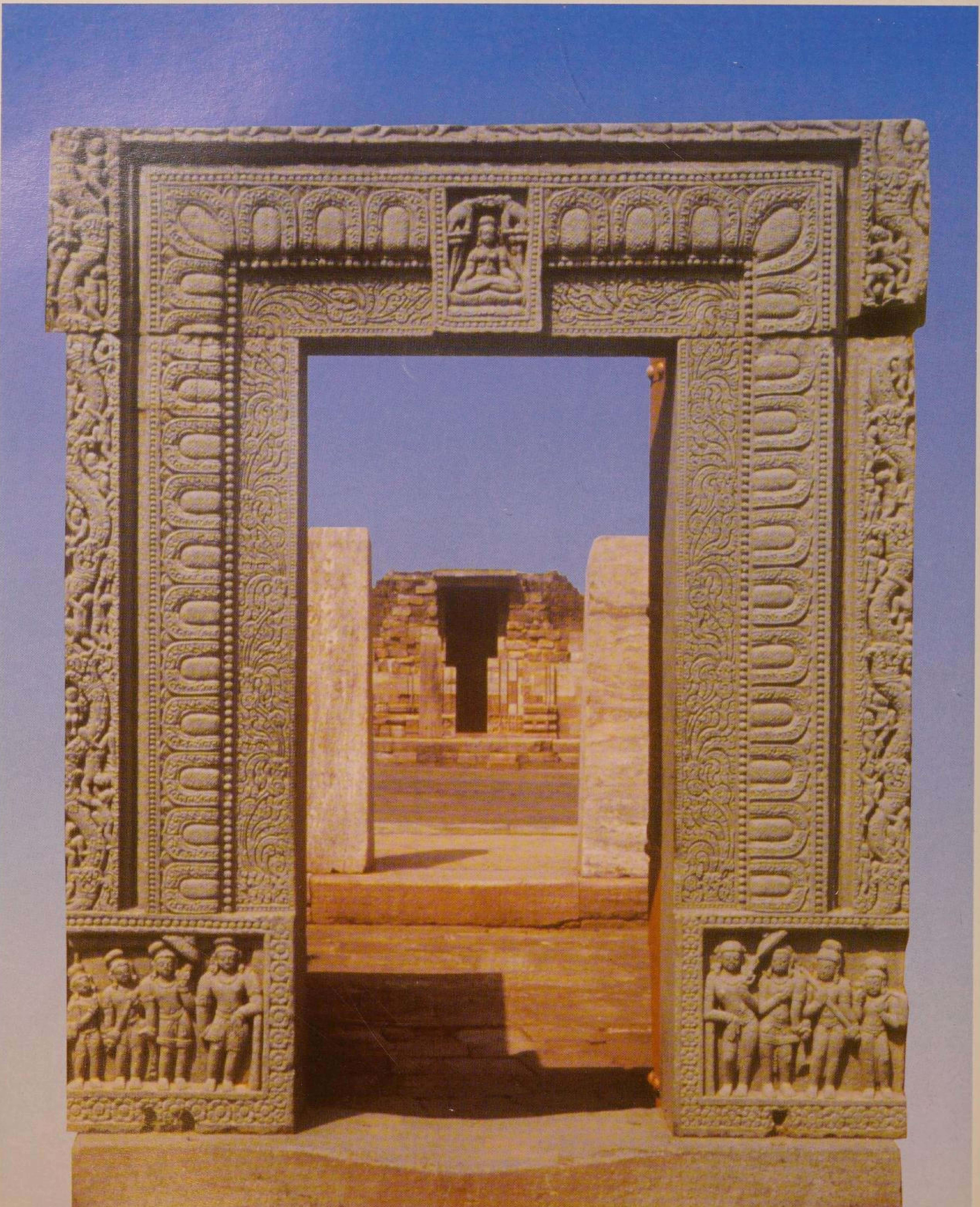


Pl. XXX:The cult image of Vyāghra Devī, a tiger-goddess
represented by a rock projection in a mountain's rock shelter;
Mount Siddheswari near Kuladha.



Pl. XXXI:Left: Bhairava; right: Cāmuṇḍā; Candraśekhara temple compound, Kapilas Hill, twelfth or thirteenth century.

Pl. XXXII: *Vāsantī-Pūjā*, the spring worship of the Goddess in a water pot placed on a *maṇḍala* with coconuts and rice; Sixty-Four Yoginī temple, Hirapur.



Pl. XXXIII: Buddhist image of Gaja-Lakṣmī; doorway lintel of Monastery No. 1, Ratnagiri, eighth century.

Glossary

abhaya: *mudrā* symbolising a deity's power to dispel fear.

ahorātra: the cycle of days and nights, the revolution of time.

akhāḍā: village gymnasium or arena used for the sport and fighting training of the youth; the tribals also use it for their sacred dance performances.

akṣa-mālā: a rosary made with large brown berries known as *rudrākṣas* ('Eyes-of-Śiva').

alasa-kanyā: 'indolent damsel', graceful female figure mostly depicted in a series on the outer walls of temples, with each figure displaying a different pose.

ālīḍha: archer's posture.

amāvasyā: new-moon day.

añjali: *mudrā* symbolising reverence to a deity; the hands showing this pose are folded in prayer.

aṅkuśa: a goad for driving elephants.

ardhaniṣkrānta: 'half-emerged', the form in which the demon Mahiṣa is depicted in a class of Mahiṣamardinī images showing the demon while emerging in human form from the carcass of the slain buffalo.

ardhaparyaṅka: 'half-divan-pose', a seated pose with one leg folded sideways under the body and the other with uplifted knee.

aṣṭamī: the eighth day of a lunar fortnight.

asura: originally 'lord, god', subsequently 'anti-god, titan, demon'.

āsurik: endowed with demoniacal features.

aśvamedha: the Vedic horse-sacrifice, performed by kings.

āvaraṇa-devatā: secondary deities carved on the outer walls of Hindu temples, forming a sort of protective layer or ring around the cult image installed in the sanctum; no worship is offered to them.

avatāra: the 'descent' of a divinity; an incarnation, especially of Viṣṇu.

āyudha: symbolical weapons and attributes in the hands of divinities.

āyudha-puruṣa: smaller male figure, holding a spear, depicted on either side of certain Hindu deities.

bali: a form of domestic worship, common to both Hinduism and Buddhism, based on the offering of flowers, water, incense as well as blood, meat and liquor to divinities and spirits (particularly to *yakṣa*s, *bhūta*s and Hindu goddesses).

bāli: Oriyā term meaning 'sand'.

bāṇa: an arrow.

bhadrāsana: seated pose with both legs hanging from the seat.

bhakti: the prevalent form of Hindu faith, implying a mutual relationship between a divinity's grace and one's total devotion to him/her and allowing the devotee (*bhakta*) to attain spiritual liberation even if remaining in the worldly society.

bhoga-maṇḍapa: the offering hall of a Hindu temple.

bhūta: 'being'; each of the five gross elements as classified according to the Sāṁkhya-*darśana*; a class of maleficent demoniacal spirits, ghosts and goblins forming a section of Śiva's suite.

bonga: a class of aniconic divinities/spirits propitiated with sacrifices (generally offered in a sacred grove) by large sections of Munda-speaking tribes of the Chota Nagpur Plateau.

caitya: ornamental motif resembling the front window of a Buddhist *caitya*-hall (apsidal sanctuary), used in the Hindu temple art of Orissa to frame medallions and windows.

cakra: 'disk, wheel'; a weapon, one of Viṣṇu's four emblems; a magico-symbolical diagram (a sub-type of *yantra*) consisting of angles, petal-like parts and other elements such as letters, mystic symbols, etc.; each of the centres of subtle energy situated within man's subtle body.

chinnamastaka: severed human head.

ḍākinī: terrific-looking demoness feeding on raw meat.

dakṣiṇācāra: a term indicating the so-called 'right-hand' Tāntric schools.

ḍamaru: drum in the form of an hour glass.

daṇḍa: 'stick, staff'.

darśana: 'sight', reciprocal eye-contact established ritually between the cult icon of a deity and its worshipper; 'way of seeing', a generic term indicating each of the six orthodox conceptual systems of ancient Hinduism.

daśamī: tenth day of a lunar fortnight.

deul: general name for a Kaliṅgan temple as a whole; more properly, the temple main shrine or *vimāna*.

devadāsī: 'maid-servant of God', sacred dancer-prostitute attached to a Hindu temple.

ḍhāla: a kind of shield.

dhanus: a stringed bow.

dharma: socio-cosmic order, righteousness, the complex of Hindu socio-religious norms, duties, laws, rites and traditions.

dharni, *darni*: in Kui (the Dravidian language spoken by the Kutia Kondhs of Phulbani district) this term means a cairn or shrine of three stones covered by a fourth, in which sacrifice, generally to the earth goddess, is offered.

dhyāna: psychic state of yogic meditation indicating the concentration of the mind on a single object; mental representation of a divinity, inward vision through which a particular divinity is transfigured and interiorised; set of iconographic prescriptions which the carved or painted image of a divinity must conform to.

dikpāla: 'regent of a direction', each of the guardians of the eight quarters of the universe, represented as deities on the upper wall portion of Hindu temples; also known as *lokapāla*.

dola: worship ritual consisting in oscillating the fetish image of a deity on a sort of swing in order to 'put it into action'.

gadā: 'mace', one of Viṣṇu's four emblems.

gajasiṁha: sculptural element of Orissan temples formed by a lion trampling over a crouching elephant.

gaṇa: the 'group, troop' of spirits or demi-gods who are the attendants of Śiva.

gārhapatya: sacred domestic fire, one of the three Vedic sacrificial fires, having a circular shape and representing the centre of family ritual.

ghaṇṭa: a bell or gong.

ghāṭ: landing place or bank along a river or coast.

ghaṭa: a vessel.

gopī: 'cowherdess', a character of the Kṛṣṇaite *bhakti* representing the individual soul; the circular dance of the *gopī*s around Kṛṣṇa symbolises the abstract relationship between God and each of his devotees.

gotipua: Oriyā term indicating a young boy dressed in female attire to perform a sacred dance representation.

grāma-devatā: Hindu village goddess.

halāhala: the poison that came to the surface at the time of the Churning of the Ocean, and that Śiva swallowed up and kept in his throat; also known as *kālakūṭa.*

hiṅgu: *Ferula asafoetida* L., the plant that produces the asafoetida (likewise known as *hiṅgu*), a poignant-smelling fluid oozing from its root.

hiṅgula: vermilion; cinnabar; a preparation of mercury with sulphur.

homa: Vedic sacrifice performed before a fire-pit.

iṣṭa-devatā: the elect tutelary deity of a family, a lineage, a sect or a single devotee, acting as a support or guide in the path leading to spiritual liberation.

jagamohana: frontal porch, hall in front of the sanctum of a temple, from which the devotees can enjoy the *darśana* of the enshrined deity; also known as *mukha-śālā.*

jakar, jakari: in Kui (the Dravidian language spoken by the Kutia Kondhs of Phulbani district) this term means 'village founder, patriarch'.

japa: oral or mental repetition, over and over again, of a specific *mantra* before the cult icon of one's elect deity.

jaṭā: hairdo fashion with hair arranged into matted locks, characteristic of the ascetics, of Śiva and also of Pārvatī.

jhāmu: Oriyā term meaning 'fire' (cf. the term *jhum*, 'slash-and-burn agriculture').

jhoti: a good-omened design drawn with the fingers on the floor or wall of an Orissan rural house.

kalaśa: a water-pot.

kālasi: Śākta diviner-shaman of Orissa, either male or female.

kāmabandha: row of amorous sculptures.

kamaṇḍalu: a kind of water vessel.

kanaka: a golden-coloured alloy made up of eight different metals.

kapāla: bowl made with the top of a human skull.

karma(n): an act, particularly a ritual act, and its result, which will be manifest in course of time; the law of repercussion of past actions on the future of an individual.

kartṛ: a kind of chopper.

kaula: the mystic union of the male and female principles, Śiva and Śakti, in a *sādhaka*'s soul.

kedu: in Kui (the Dravidian language spoken by the Kutia Kondhs of Phulbani district) this term means 'buffalo'.

khaḍga: a kind of sword.

khākharā: Kaliṅgan order of temple architecture characterised by an oblong plan and a barrel-vaulted or semi-cylindrical elongated roof, used exclusively to enshrine the Śākta divinities (from *kakhāra* or *vaitā-kakhāru*, Oriyā name for a variety of pumpkin resembling in shape the roof of this variety of temple).

khaṭvāṅga: a club made with a long bone topped by a human skull.

kheṭaka: a kind of shield.

kirīṭa-mukuṭa: bejewelled tiara or tall conical coiffure adorned with gems.

koṭarākṣī: 'sunken-eyed', with special reference to Cāmuṇḍā's outward appearance.

kṣetra: 'field, area of land', the sacred pilgrimage zone surrounding a Hindu temple and depending on the latter in the administration of cult affairs.

kumbha: a jar, water-pot.

kuṇḍa: a pool, especially a sacred pool or tank for bathing included within a temple compound.

kuṇḍalinī: the power of knowledge, the divine power-essence of Śiva that lies rolled up in the shape of a dormant she-snake at the bottom of the microcosmic subtle body.

kuṇḍikā: a small vase.

kuṭhāra: a hatchet

lakuṭa: a staff, club.

lalitāsana: 'playful pose', a seated pose with one leg pendant from the seat and the other folded sideways under the body.

līlā: 'divine game, play'.

maithuna: coition, sex-congress image.

maṇḍala: sacred symmetrical diagram, generally circular in shape, drawn on an altar with coloured powders and used to invoke a divinity; a magico-symbolical representation of the sacred universe arousing the consciousness of the identity of microcosm and macrocosm; also a province, district, any circumscribed area.

maṇḍapa: frontal porch, hall-shaped pavilion in front of the main shrine (*vimāna*) of a Hindu temple, having usually a pyramidal roof; there can be one or a row of them in a single temple.

maṅgala: 'auspicious', a class of narrative poems of Bengal meant to popularise the folk goddess-cults among the high-caste people and to identify such goddesses with different manifestations of the Mahādevī.

maṇi, maṇika: a mythical gem generally associated with the *nāgas*, who act as its guardians.

mantra: a magico-mystic formula or utterance formed by one or more syllables and representing a divinity in the form of basic sounds.

mātāghoṛā: votive clay figurine of a horse, usually deposited under a tree sacred to some goddess or *yakṣī*.

maṭha: Hindu monastic establishment, cell of an ascetic.

mātṛ, mātṛkā, mātṛ-gaṇa: 'divine mother', female deity belonging to a group of goddesses (traditionally numbering seven or eight) regarded, according to the different contexts, as consorts of the main male divinities, as astral powers or as evil forces.

māyā: power of cosmic delusion, in its essence identical to *prakṛti* and *śakti*, which gives rise to phenomenal appearances.

meriah: the victim of human sacrifice as it was performed in by-gone days by some sections of the Kondh people to propitiate their earth-goddess; also the sacrificial rite in question as such.

mithuna: amorous couple, love-play image.

mokṣa: total spiritual liberation, freedom from the cycle of life-death-rebirth.

mṛga: any wild animal or big game, in particular deer and antelope.

mudrā: 'seal', hand posture or gesture conveying a specific mystic meaning.

muhūrtta: portion of time, generally the thirtieth part of the period of twenty-four hours, into which the cycle of day and night is divided up.

muṇḍa-mālā: a skull-garland.

nāga: serpent genius, mostly with human features from the waist upwards; his female counterpart is known as *nāgī*.

nāgakanyā: female serpent figure, usually with human features from the waist upwards and with a canopy of serpent hoods over her head, depicted on the walls of Hindu temples.

nāgamātā: 'mother-serpent', any *nāgī* holding the cult status.

nāga-pāśa: a noose formed by a living snake that was viewed in Vedic times as Varuṇa's own favourite weapon.

nāgarāja: any *nāga* holding the cult status.

nāga-stambha: pillar encircled by one or more *nāgas*.

nakṣatra: lunar mansion or asterism.

nara- vāhana: row of men forming the *vāhana* of certain deities.

nāṭa: 'dance'.

nāṭa-mandira: the dancing hall of a Hindu temple.

navamī: the ninth day of a lunar fortnight.

navapatrikā: 'nine plants', the name of a ceremony held during the autumnal *Durgā-Pūjā*.

nirmāṁsā: 'fleshless', with special reference to Cāmuṇḍā's outward appearance.

nṛtya: 'dance'.

nyāsa: Tāntric ceremony consisting in a ritual projection of divinities into different parts of an adept's body.

oṣa: ritual fast.

padma: the lotus flower

padmāsana: 'lotus-pose', a seated pose with legs crossed and the soles turned upwards.

pakṣa: 'wing', a lunar fortnight, which can be further termed as *kṛṣṇa* ('dark', starting from the full-moon day) or *śukla* ('bright', starting from the new-moon day).

pañca-devatā-upāsana: adoration of the five divinities of the traditional Hindu pentad (Śiva-Viṣṇu-Śakti-Sūrya-Gaṇeśa).

pañca-makāra: left-hand Tāntric mode of worship based on the ritual use of five means to spiritual realisation, whose names all begin with the letter *M* (*mada* or liquor, *matsya* or fish, *māṁsa* or meat, *mudrā* or grains, *maithuna* or sexual intercourse); also known as *pañca-tattva*.

pañcamī: fifth day of a lunar fortnight.

paraśu: a battle-axe.

pārśva-devatā: each of the accessory deities occupying the three outer niches of the central projections of the *vimāna* (the main spire-roofed shrine containing the sanctum) of a Hindu temple; they receive worship and are connected in doctrine with the main divinity of the temple.

parvaṇa (Oriyā *parab*): period of change of the lunar phase; any religious festival celebrated in one such period.

paryaṅka: 'divan-pose', a seated pose with one leg resting on the other and the soles turned upwards.

pātāla: under-world, infernal region, the abode of the mythical *nāgas*.

pāṭuā: Orissan low-caste penitent inflicting himself injury in the course of an ordeal taken up to please some form of the Goddess, usually during the Caitra (spring) festivals.

penu: in Kui (the Dravidian language spoken by the Kutia Kondhs of Phulbani district) this term means generically 'a deity'.

piṇḍa: funerary cake, cooked ball of rice and other grains offered as an oblation to the dead in the *śrāddha* ritual.

pīpal: *Ficus religiosa* L., the sacred fig tree anciently known as *aśvattha*, the *bodhi* tree of the Buddhists.

pīṭha: 'seat, throne, pedestal', place of pilgrimage at which a form of the Goddess is worshipped.

pitṛ: 'father', in the sense of an ancestor, for whose well-being a descendant must perform oblation rites (*śrāddha*).

prakṛti: *natura naturans*, cosmic substance, primordial form, the non-caused cause of phenomenal existence.

pralaya: the dissolution of the universe at the end of a cosmic aeon (*kalpa*).

prāṇa: vital breath, energy.

prasāda —'divine grace', consecrated food offering taken by the devotees after it is offered to the presiding deity of a temple.

pratipada: the initial day of a lunar fortnight.

preta: ghost of a late person, departed soul still roaming about this world awaiting to rejoin the *pitṛ*s.

preta-vāhana: the corpse acting as *vāhana* (mount) of a number of fierce-looking Tāntric deities, both Hindu and Buddhist.

pūjā: 'ritualistic homage, worship, adoration', normally including the presentation of offerings before the cult icon of a deity; 'religious festival' when the worship encompasses the whole community in a big gathering.

pūrṇa-ghaṭa: 'full-jar, vase of plenty', a foliated vase held with both hands in front of the chest by some serpent deities or geniuses.

pūrṇa-rūpa: 'full-form', the chief manifestation or aspect of a divinity in the outlook of a given religious sect.

pūrṇimā: full-moon day.

puruṣa: 'male, man', one of the names of the Absolute, the ultimate principle, universal spirit; as a proper noun, this term designates the Cosmic Man (Puruṣa) of Vedic cosmogonies.

pustaka: 'book, manuscript', one of the emblems of Brahmā and Sarasvatī.

raja: 'menses, menstrual discharge', also with reference to the sacred menstrual period of the Goddess in her aspect as Mother Earth; also known as *ṛtu*.

rākṣasa: a kind of wandering demon or ogre, whose vigour reaches its apex at night.

rāṣṭra-devatā: national deity.

ratha: processional car.

rekha-piḍhā: Kaliṅgan order of temple architecture characterised by the juxtaposition of a *vimāna* (known as *deul*) with the roof shaped as a curvilinear spire and a *maṇḍapa* (known as *jagamohana*) with the roof shaped as a pyramid formed by receding projecting members.

rohita: a variety of goldfish.

ṛṣi: mythical seer.

sādhaka: an ascetic initiated to some Tāntric-yogic mode of worship.

sādhana: 'ways to determine or attain a particular object', the overall religious practice in the Tāntric-yogic outlook.

śakti: female divine energy; the active and dynamic power of the godhead, mostly conceived as the female aspect or the consort of the male divinity, causing the latter to manifest himself in the cosmos; this term also designates a kind of spear.

śālabhañjikā: the woman-and-tree-motif of Hindu and Buddhist art.

samabhaṅga: body posture in which the body, depicted frontally, appears erect, straight and rigid.

saṁkrānti: cyclic astronomical conjunction occurring when the sun enters a new house of the solar Zodiac in the course of its revolution motion.

samudra-manthana: the mythic Churning of the Ocean.

śaṅkha: 'conch', one of Viṣṇu's four emblems.

saptamī: the seventh day of a lunar fortnight.

śāsana-devatā: each of the twenty-four goddesses acting as the devoted attendants of the as many *tīrthaṁkaras* of Jainism.

ṣaṣṭhī: sixth day of a lunar fortnight.

śāstra: 'teaching, treatise', any sacred treatise or body of learning regarded as most authoritative.

sāttvik: endowed with the qualities of *sattva* (consciousness, intellect, sentiment, brilliance).

saumya: 'relative to the Soma principle', a term indicating the propitious and benevolent aspect of both Śiva and Śakti.

śava: a corpse.

śavārūḍha: 'mounted on corpse', with reference to deities having a recumbent human corpse as their *vāhana.*

siddhi: any superhuman power or faculty attained through the observance of some *sādhana.*

śikhaṇḍaka: a three-lock coiffure worn by Skanda/Kārttikeya and by his female counterpart Kaumārī.

śilpa-śāstra: treatise of Hindu sacred architecture.

simul, simli, semal (Skr. *śālmali, śalmali*): *Bombax malabaricum* D.C., the silk-cotton tree, sacred to the Hindus as Yama's tree and used in many tribal ceremonies.

snāna: 'bath', lustral rite consisting in bathing the cult icon of a deity with water.

snuhi: *Euphorbia neriifolia* L., a poisonous plant having vomitory, expectorant, emetic and purgative qualities, sacred to the Hindu serpent-goddess Manasā.

sphoṭa: eternal, transcendental, indivisible and creative sound, the sound-aspect of *Brahman*, the source of all *mantras*.

śrāddha: Hindu oblation rites for the dead performed to nourish the departed souls for passage to the world of the ancestors.

śrīcakra: *yantra* representing the supreme form of ultimate reality, i.e., the Universal Goddess.

stambha: 'pillar'.

svayambhū-mūrti: aniconic image of a divinity that is said to have self-generated.

tāmasik: endowed with the qualities of *tamas* (inertia, ignorance, passiveness, obscurity).

tāṇḍava: the violent dance performed by Śiva after the dissolution of the universe.

tapas: 'heat', especially the heat generated by ascetic practices.

tejas: the igneous and radiant energy emanated by the gods, the warriors and the ascetics.

ṭhākurāṇī: 'Our Lady', any *grāma-devatā* or plague-goddess of Orissa enjoying a regional fame.

tīrtha: 'ford, crossing place', Hindu sacred place of pilgrimage situated on a water-course, a pond, or the seashore.

tīrthaṁkara: the twenty-four recognised spiritual teachers of the Jaina tradition, each of whom, having attained ultimate spiritual liberation, is termed as Jina (Victor).

tithi: lunar day.

tribhaṅga: body posture in which the body forms three graceful bends.

triśūla: a trident.

tṛtīyā: third day of a lunar fortnight.

ugra: 'powerful, violent, terrible', a term indicating the terrific and malevolent aspect of Śiva and Śakti.

ulūka: an owl.

ūrdhvaliṅga: Śiva's erect phallus, or the adjective specifying that the god is conceived or depicted with erect phallus.

utsava: 'beginning, festival', a term generally indicating the most ritualistic part of a religious festival.

vāhana: 'vehicle, carrier', the celestial mount (generally an animal) depicted below the pedestal of the anthropomorphic image of a deity or associated with him/her in sacred literature.

vajra: 'thunderbolt, diamond'.

vāmācāra: a term indicating the so-called 'left-hand' Tāntric schools.

varada: *mudrā* symbolising a deity's power to bestow boons; the hand showing this pose is pendant with palm outward and fingers stretched.

vaṭa: *Ficus bengalensis* L. = *Ficus indica* L., commonly known as banyan, the largest Indian fig tree provided with characteristic aerial roots.

veśa: 'dress, guise', any attire the cult icon of a Hindu goddess is concealed with during the celebration of different rites and festivals.

vetāla: skeleton-like ghost, vampire or ghoul frequenting cemeteries and ascribed with the power of revive a dead person; his female counterpart is known as *vetālī*.

vīja-pūraka: a ball of meal meaning an offering.

vīṇā: the Indian lute.

vīra: 'hero', a stage of the Tāntric initiation process.

viśvapadma: double lotus cushion forming the seat of a divinity.

vrata: religious vow, usually involving a fasting period.

yajña: 'sacrifice', especially the Vedic sacrifice.

yakṣa: *genius loci*, mostly associated with the vegetable world, regarded as the semi-divine guardian of a particular territory; his female counterpart is known as *yakṣī*.

yantra: magico-mystic diagram formed by interlocking triangles and straight lines, used as a device for keeping the mind engaged in meditation or worship.

yātrā: Hindu temple festival celebrated to pay homage to the installed deity with processions and worship rites.

yoginī: a female adept of *yoga*; the female partner in the execution of a Tāntric sex rite; a witch, sorceress; a demoness, ogress; female deity belonging to a group of goddesses (traditionally numbering sixty-four) whose nomenclature is extremely varied.

yoni-paṭṭa: circular- or square-shaped flat pedestal representing the female generative organ, upon which the *liṅga* worshipped in the sanctum of a Śaiva temple usually rests; also known as Gaurī-*paṭṭa*.

yūpa: sacrificial post or pillar.

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(Abbreviation: *OHRJ* = *Orissa Historical Research Journal*).

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Francesco Brighenti (b. Venice, Italy, 1963) has travelled extensively in India in pursuit of his academic concerns around the living traditions of Hinduism. And, resultantly, having worked on the goddess-cults of Orissa (Eastern India) during 1995-97, he took his Ph. D from the Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. Earlier, in 1991, he graduated in History from the University of Venice.

As a member of the Venetian Academy of Indian Studies: an Association of Indologists affiliated to the Department of Studies of Eastern Asia, University of Venice, Dr. Brighenti is presently researching upon the religious cults practised by different tribes of Orissa, like the Hill Saoras and the Kondhs, and their relation to the regional typologies of Hindu cults.

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